

## Byzantium and Islam



# Byzantium and Islam

*Collected Studies on Byzantine-Muslim Encounters*

*By*

Daniel J. Sahas



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Cover illustration: Arab ambassadors to the Byzantine court of Leo VI at Constantinople are shown the liturgical vessels of Hagia Sophia, as shown in a miniature from the Madrid Skylitzes, a 12th-century manuscript from Sicily (Biblioteca Digital Hispánica: MS Graecus Vitr. 26–2, folio 144, verso).

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## Preface

Byzantine Studies have reached a high level of scholarship in the international academic scene, especially in the European and North American continents; one could not yet say the same with regard to the relations of these studies with the Arab and the Islamic world. Religious Studies (*Religionswissenschaft*) have also reached an impressive level of breath and maturation; not so, again, with regard to the relations of Byzantine Christianity with Islam – not an insignificant connection in the context of world history and civilization, inter-religious encounter, cross-fertilization, interaction and dialogue. The notion “encounter” is not to be considered as a pedantic issue applied to superficial social or public relations, let alone a state with some political, economic, strategic, expansionist or other kind of profitable and self-interest disposition. Encounter signifies a relational state of being; the kind of disposition and behavior that springs out first from self-respect and entails then, in dignity and humility, constructive interest, sensitivity and respect for the “other”! As a human community we are still far from such a dignified point of maturation; otherwise we would not be still disregarding, let alone ignoring, negating and insulting the identity of the “other” through its manifestation in writings, symbols, and monuments of any kind.

Islamic studies were for me both, the opportunity and the challenge to see another religious tradition (in this case, Islam) with the *religionswissenschaftliche* methodology and frame of mind, *phenomenologically*-oriented, *humanly*-expressed, *ecumenically*-motivated. As a graduate student and during my subsequent academic life, from the early 1960's to the late 2010's and beyond, I had the fortune, indeed the blessing, to have met a number of teachers and colleagues of high caliber in scholarship and sensitivity who, with their eloquent and provocative teaching, their human and friendly disposition, their oral and written word, but especially with their ethos and example, each one of them in his or her own way, contributed to the endeavor of the study of Religion, History of Religions, Islamic and Middle-Eastern Studies, Byzantine-Muslim Relations, to put all these in their proper relationship and in their exciting framework and inter-dependence. Although most of these persons are no longer bodily with us, yet by the example of their life and the quality of their work, they still remain eye and ear witnesses to the on-goings of our history, now and for many years to come!

Most, if not all, of my collected studies in this volume are, in some way, the seeds and the fruit of an encounter with them, either in the classroom or in an amphitheater, on the way to or in the context of some regional or international

conference, in their home or in my home, in an airplane, in some written or electronic correspondence archive, in a campus office, or in some casual environment. Such a list can be long, exhaustive of patience, but on account of such a weakness it can never be bypassed, or forgotten. In the context of this volume, I need to remember:

**Harold E. Fey** (1898–1990), my supervisor Professor during my post graduate studies in Indianapolis (1965–66), co-author of the second volume *Ecumenical Advance: 1948–68* in the monumental *History of the Ecumenical Movement* (2009), Editor of the well-known periodical *The Christian Century* (during the years 1956–1964), a passionate man for ecumenism, compassion and peace-oriented studies. **Willem A. Bijlefeld** (1925–2013), my Professor of Islamic Studies in Hartford, Conn. (1966–1969), my doctoral studies supervisor and instigator in exploring John of Damascus as a Father of the Church and pioneer historian of religions and of Islam. **Robert T. Parsons** (1911–1997), my Professor of African Studies at Hartford, who offered the comfort of his house for me to complete my dissertation while he would be on sabbatical in Africa. **Ford Lewis Battles** (1915–1979), the well-known translator of Calvin's *Institutes*, a relentless scholar and most encouraging, critical and supportive member of my dissertation Committee. **Alexander Dimitrievich Schmemmann** (1921–1983), the unforgettable visionary Orthodox priest, scholar, dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, and **John Meyendorff** (1926–1992), the memorable protopresbyter, aristocrat in descent, ethos, scholarship and collegiality, dean also of St. Vladimir's Seminary and faculty member of Fordham University, both of them renown scholars and prolific writers, who left life untimely, but who had always a place and time, in private meetings and in theological conferences in N. America, for a novice scholar on Byzantine-Muslim relations. **Irfan A. Shahīd** (1926–2016), a mentor, advisor and always friendly colleague at Dumbarton Oaks Center of Byzantine Studies, Washington D.C. (1996–1997), an authority and an inexhaustible source of information and views on Byzantium and the Arabs, an enthusiastic supporter of my research. **Speros Vryonis** (1928–2019), a senior advisor and a colleague for years on Medieval Middle Eastern and Islamic issues, and not only. **Wilfred Cantwell Smith** (1916–2000) the well acknowledged Canadian Islamologist, director of the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, from whom most scholars and Canadian Universities teaching world religions, especially Islamic Studies, were seeking academic advice and his critical evaluation of their work, programs and standards. **Nicholas Oikonomidis** (1934–2000), the distinguished Byzantinist in Canada for years, colleague and founder of the Canadian Committee of Byzantinists. **Bernard Lewis** (1916–2018), the meticulous Jewish orientalist, acute, respected and prolific scholar.

**Hadia Dajani-Shakeel** (1933–), the beloved Palestinian colleague, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto and of Institute of Palestinian Studies, whose homey and gentle collegiality competed and matched her integral scholarship. **Sidney H. Griffith** (1938–), an internationally known professor at the Catholic University in America in Washington D.C., specialist on Arabic Christianity, Syriac studies and Christian-Muslim encounter, whose doctoral encounter with Abū Qurra and mine doctoral encounter with John of Damascus brought us together in various academic *fora* as members of same learned Societies, in regional and international conferences as well as in various publications. **Yvonne Y. and Wadi Z. Haddad**, the memorable couple of teachers, friends and colleagues, Editors of that very special 500+page-volume *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (University of Florida Press, 1995) that brought together a most interesting mix of contemporary colleagues and Contributors (like, Mahmud Ayoub, Willem A. Bijlefeld, Issa J. Boullata, John B. Carman, Kenneth Cragg, Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, Frederick Mathewson Denny, Johann Haafkens, Wadi Z. Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, David A. Kerr, Donald P. Little, Roland E. Miller, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Jorgen S. Nielsen, Sulayman S. Nyang, James E. Royster, Annemarie Schimmel, Olaf Schumann, Jan Slomp, Jane I. Smith, R. Marston Speight, Mark N. Swanson, Christian W. Troll, Harold S. Vogelaar, Jacques Waardenburg, and Antonie Wessels). **Jane Damen McAuliffe** (1944–), from her years as Chair of the Department for the Study of Religion and Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, before returning to the USA, a hospitable General Editor of the six-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden, Brill: 2001–2006). **John L. Esposito** (1940–), Professor of Religion & International Affairs and of Islamic Studies, founding director of the “Prince Alwaleed Centre of Muslim-Christian Understanding” at Georgetown University, Georgetown D.C., and many others. The list could go on for several pages to include wonderful persons as well as equally wonderful occasions and memories – all this to reconfirm that nothing is a matter of chance but of divine providence and, especially, that nothing can one achieve or offer, alone!

We live in an era in which the electronic means and the sites of communication make lists like this much broader and ever easier – always with a danger, however, that such an exercise might be rendered more impersonal and superficial and thus less constructive and educational. My pathological optimism makes me hope that the younger generation of scholars will not only overcome such a miserable pitfall but that they will turn such a challenge into a flourishing garden of priceless intellectual and academic achievements – a truly personal, living and lasting “Academia.edu”! In the folds of this site I am already finding bright and thirsty minds, diamonds of academic achievements,

reading articles of mine critically and enriching them constructively with new scholarly and bibliographical data. This list of young scholars is becoming for me much longer than my personal one; something which makes me confident that the drives and concerns which attracted some of us to devote our life to the subject of the manifold Christian-Muslim relations will expand, making this field of studies to flourish in multiple directions. This is *the* antidote to any kind of self-righteousness, empathetic radicalism, conscious ignorance, historical distortion, populist oversimplification and religious provincialism (in the end, to any form of human and cultural darkness) which we are experiencing often in our own days and in some regions of the world.

My profound sentiments of hope and confidence are leading me to an expression of sincere gratitude and appreciation to Brill, a source of quality scholarly publications in the manifold fields of relevant academic endeavours. My personal thanks go to Dr. Maurits van den Boogert who embraced the prospect of this publication wholeheartedly and offered his professional experience to its production tirelessly; a process which created for me a bond of a priceless friendship.

*Daniel J. Sahas*

Athens, Friday July 23rd, 2020 (a day of a most sad awakening)

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“Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) on Islam”, *The Muslim World* 73 (1983), 1–21.

## XXIX

“Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), 409–436.

**PART 1**

*Mental and Theological Predispositions  
for a Relationship, or Conflict*





## The Notion of “Religion” with Reference to Islam in the Byzantine Anti-islamic Literature

Religion in general and Orthodox Christianity in particular, although an essential component of the Byzantine society,<sup>1</sup> and the determining factor in refuting Islam, is nowhere defined in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature. To arrive at some idea of the Byzantine religious self-understanding and its treatment of Islam as a religion on the basis of this body of literature, one has to identify religious characteristics by means of inference, and reverse them to a positive statement; because such references to Islam are characteristically negative, indeed, polemic.

Byzantine Christianity and Islam in practice viewed each other as world-views, “religious” communities and theocratic empires mutually exclusive of each other, with only few, and not very honest, exceptions. Nicholas Mysticos, for example, Patriarch of Constantinople (901–907, 912–925), in a letter addressed in 913 to the Abbasid caliph al-Muktadir (908–932) wrote that,

there are two lordships, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, which stand above all lordship on earth, and shine out like the two nightly beacons in the firmament. They ought, for this very reason alone, to be in contact and brotherhood and not, because we differ in our ways of life, habits and religion, remain alien in all ways to each other.<sup>2</sup>

However, such statements are more of a diplomatic rhetoric made in negotiations for freeing Byzantine captives of war, and less words of conviction – let alone principles of Byzantine policy. They may even be seen as interplay between recognition and rejection of the Arabs as a military power, characteristic of the tenth century. The Byzantines knew of the Arabs, even before Islam as ‘Saracens’,<sup>3</sup> a name of no definite ethnic identity with a pejorative and

1 In the words of Harry Magoulias, “Byzantium’s greatest creative contribution to mankind”, *Byzantine Christianity, Emperor, Church and the West* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1982), p. ix. Of the many monographs on Byzantine Christianity a notable one is by Joan M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

2 PG 111:27–36; at 28B. *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters. Greek Text and English Translation*, by R.J.H. Jenkins and L.G. Westerink (Washington D.C. 1973), p. 2.16–18.

3 Cf. Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984) *in passim*. Also his *Rome and the Arabs. A*

negative meaning. The Saracens were the “easterner” nomads,<sup>4</sup> ‘arabs’ in the seminal sense of the word, barbarians in culture, living in tents in the deserts east of the Jordan river, less involved with commerce and more with *razzia* warfare.<sup>5</sup> In some instances the name ‘Saracens’ had even a connotation of evil people. In the *Life of Saint Pelagia the Harlot*,<sup>6</sup> for example, it is said that after the ascetic bishop Nonnus baptized the well-known actress of Antioch turned harlot and administered to her the communion, the devil cried out, saying,

Alas, alas, what I am suffering from this decrepit old man? It was not enough for you to snatch from me three thousand Saracens and baptize them, and obtain them for your God.<sup>7</sup>

Three thousand Saracen captives of the devil are less worthy than one harlot!

The Saracens, as Muslims now, were viewed as rivals of the imperial Byzantium. When the caliphate moved from Damascus to Baghdad the Arabs became ‘Persians’.<sup>8</sup> The change in name is neither accidental nor meaningless: as the Persians of the past, these contemporary ‘Persians’ were the new enemies of Byzantium. More to the point, as late as in the fourteenth century Muslims were identified as ‘Achaemenids’, the dynasty which had threatened the Roman Empire. Interestingly enough, even Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) calls his captors, who were Osmanli Turks, “pirates from the race of the Achaemenids”.<sup>9</sup> For the Byzantines, Islam itself did nothing to ameliorate the image of the Saracens. On the contrary, the Arab invasions and the fundamental claim of Islam that it is the revival of the purest monotheism of

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*Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), pp. 123–141.

4 According to P.K. Hitti, the *sharqīyyūn*, from *sharq* (East); *History of the Arabs*, Tenth edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 43–44 where more references to the name.

5 Cf. e.g. Eusebius' description of the Arabs, “called by us Saracens”, in his *Commentary on Isaiah* 13:20; the many references in Procopius, *On the Buildings*; and Theophanes in *Chronographia*, ed. Carolus de Boor, vol. 1 (Lipsiae: 1883; 1963) p. 300.

6 Written by the deacon James, translated into Latin by Eustochius, PL 73:663–72; also in ASS, Oct. IV, 261–6 (BHL 6605); English translation in Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (London, 1936), pp. 267–81. Benedicta Ward, *Harlot of the Desert. A Study of repentance in early monastic sources* (Kalamazoo, MI.: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1987), pp. 57–75.

7 Ch. IX; Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–2.

8 Cf. Symeon Metaphrastes, *Martyrion of St. Arethas and his fellow martyrs*, PG 115: 1277D.

9 Speros Lambros, “Γρηγορίου Παλαμά Ἐπιστολή πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς”, *Neos Hellenomnemon* 16 (1922), 9. On Palamas' captivity to the Turks, see G. Georgiades Arnakis, “Gregory Palamas among the Turks and documents of his captivity as historical sources”, *Speculum* 26 (1951), 104–118; Daniel J. Sahas, “Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), 409–436; and “Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) on Islam”, *The Muslim World* 73 (1983), 1–21. See Chapters 29 and 28 in this volume.

Abraham, God's ultimate and perfected revealed religion to mankind,<sup>10</sup> placed the Christianity which had been perceived by Muhammad on the defensive as an adulterated monotheism. Thus, Islam did not have the chance to be seen by the Byzantines for what it was essentially, let alone for what it was meant to be. At best Islam was seen as a "heresy", and at worst as "superstition", or barbarism. Given, however, the animosity produced by the protracted conflicts with Christological heresies, one may wonder which of the two characterizations carried a heavier weight!

This very negative context notwithstanding, one can identify certain insights which the Byzantines considered as characteristic components of Religion against which they contrasted Islam.

## 1 Ethnic Identity as Religion

"Islam" as a name, and thus as an awareness of the essence of the religious tradition as such, appears nowhere in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature. Racial or ethnic names are the primary means of referring to Islam. For example, John Moschus (c.550–619) in his *Leimon*, and Anastasius Sinaites (c.640–c.700) refer to "Arabs", not to Muslims. However, the name had religious overtones as well. In Question 126 of his *Questions and Answers*,<sup>11</sup> where the query is posed as to whether or not Satan had fallen for not having bowed down to Adam,<sup>12</sup> Anastasius' response was that "Such as these are the myths of the Greeks and the Arabs". As it is not clear how pagans would be dealing with Adam, creation of man, Satan, human nature and the origin of sin, one may rightfully agree with Sidney Griffith that the expression "Greeks and pagans" may be read to mean "pagan Arabs".<sup>13</sup> "Arab", therefore, connotes "pagan" and by extension "Islam" "paganism". John of Damascus also (c.655–c.749), who is the first to deal with Islam as a faith, treats Islam as "the religion of the Ishmaelites", who are "also called Saracens and Hagarenes".<sup>14</sup> In John of Damascus "Hagarenes", "Ishmaelites", "Saracenes" consciously connote a tribal faith which is that of the father and founder of a tribe. In this particular instance all three names for

10 "This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM". Sūrah *al-Mā'idah* (5:3).

11 PG 89:311–824.

12 Surah *al-Baqarah* (2:34).

13 Sidney H. Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987), 341–58, at 346–7.

14 P. Bonifatius Kotter, ed. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* vol. IV (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), p. 60. Cf. also Daniel J. Sahas *John of Damascus on Islam. The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972).

Islam bear a pejorative meaning, as the religion of the illegitimate descendants of Abraham. Such an interpretation has its roots in Sozomenus,<sup>15</sup> repeated by Bartholomeus of Edessa,<sup>16</sup> and George Phrantzes (1401–1478).<sup>17</sup> By using these names and giving them their own etymological explanations that the name “Saracen” is actually “Sarracene” and it is derived from Sarrah saying that her master dismissed her “empty” [κενή] of grace, the Byzantine polemicists contrasted Christianity and Islam as religions descending from the same ancestral roots, the one legitimate and the other as false faith. The seventh-century Christian Syrian apocalyptic writing of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara<sup>18</sup> strikes a hopeful note that in the end Christ will defeat “Ishmael”, – again, a collective racial identification for the Muslims.

A minor exception to such identification is John of Nikiou, monophysite bishop and “rector” of the bishops of Upper Egypt (late 7th c). He calls the Arabs “Moslems” and “Ishmaelites”.<sup>19</sup> Theophanes the Confessor (d. c.817) interchanges the name Arabs with “Hagarenes” and “Saracens”, referring in both instances to Muslims.<sup>20</sup> George the monk, the “Hamartolos” (9th c.) also refers to “Arabs who are now known as Saracens (ὡν δὲ Σαρακηνοί)”,<sup>21</sup> suggesting that “Arabs” is their earliest identification, “Saracens” the religious one by which they are now known.

Religion, then, is a traditional way of life; a definition which implies history, lineage, culture, family rules and a sense of continuity. Islam is a family or tribal religion descending from Ishmael, the son of Abraham. George Hamartolos calls Muhammad “heresiarch” and Islam, Muhammad’s “hateful and most abominable heresy”,<sup>22</sup> implying the teaching, “preference” (*heresy*), style of life, and law, of the strong man within the tribe.<sup>23</sup>

15 *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. R. Hussey, vol. II (Oxonii, 1860), p. 671. Cf. also E. Th. Soulogiannis, “Σαρακηνοί καὶ Χριστιανισμός”, *Parnassos* (Athens) 15 (1973), 293.

16 PG 104:1448B.

17 *Chronicon majus*, PG 156:892. Cf. V. Christides “The names Ἄραβες, Σαρακηνοί etc. and their false Byzantine etymologies”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65 (1972), 331.

18 S.P. Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam”, in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed. *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale-Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 17 ff.

19 *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiou*, translated from Zotenberg’s Ethiopic Text by R.H. Charles (Oxford: William and Norgate, 1916) pp. 116, 120.

20 Cf. e.g. *Chronographia*, pp. 355 and 356.

21 PG 110:873B.

22 PG 110:864D.

23 Bartholomeus of Edessa (9th c.) also, one of the most vehement polemicists of Islam treats Islam as the heresy of the Saracens “who are called Ishmaelites”. *Confutatio Mahometis*, PG 104:1384–1448.



Photius (820–893), Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote about his “embassy to the Assyrians”, “Assyrians” here meaning “Arabs” and, of course, Muslim Arabs.<sup>24</sup> Christians living in Baghdad would not have been called “Assyrians”. Thus the name “Assyrians” also carries the weight of some religious meaning, possibly that of non-Christians. Symeon Metaphrastes also refers to the Arab Muslims as “Persians”, and in the Arabic Life of Symeon the Stylite the name “Saracens” has been translated as “Persians”.

Nicetas Choniates (c.1155–c.1215/6) deals with “Hagarenes” and “Saracens”, but with a greater specificity. The 20th chapter of his *Thesaurus Orthodoxiae* bears the title “Περὶ τῆς θρησκείας τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν”.<sup>25</sup> Here the *religion* of the Hagarenes is examined. By the 13th century enough of the doctrine and practice of Islam had become known for the Byzantines outside the eastern provinces to be able to put it into a “system” which could then be defined as “religion”. Islam is seen as the way of life of an [ethnic] people. It is a people’s traditional tribal affiliation. The Arabs, as Muslims, are οἱ τῆς Ἀγαρ; the sons, or the descendants of Hagar, as the *Vita* of St. Peter the Athonite puts it,<sup>26</sup> not people who profess submission to God.

As a summary on this point, one could mention Abū Qurra, the Melkite bishop of Harrān (795–812). In his various *opuscula*<sup>27</sup> Abū Qurra treats Islam and the Muslims as “Arabs” (VIII), “Hagarenes” (IX, XX, XXV), “Saracens” (XIX, XXI–XXV, XXXIII), “barbarians” (XIX, XXXV–XXXVII), and also as a “religion” (*θρησκεία*, XIX); all of them interchangeably. Three of these appellations, Saracens, barbarians and religion, occur together in the same *opusculum* (XIX). According to Abū Qurra, *θρησκεία* is something which is transmitted from father to children. What people follow is the teaching of their fathers, and where people differ from one another is in what they have learned from their fathers.<sup>28</sup> In this *opusculum* Abū Qurra contrasts what a “barbarian” that is, a Muslim has learned to what a Christian has been taught!

What this sketchy excursus shows is that for the Byzantines religion is neither a *thing*, nor *one* thing; Religion is a “they”. Religion is people and the way they are known and can be identified, ethnically, nationally and traditionally.

24 Cf. J. Hergenröther, *Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel: Sein Leben, seine Schriften und das griechische Schisma, I* (Regensburg, 1867), 14; III (1869), 341–43; Warren T. Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1980) pp. 25–26.

25 PG 140:105–121 and 124A–136C.

26 Text in François Halkin, “Vie brève de S. Pierre l’Athonite”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 106 (1988), 249–255, at 250. BHG 1506e.

27 PG 97:1461–1601.

28 *Op. cit.* XIX, PG 97:1544C.

Without being defined, religion is observed and understood in terms of claims of history, tradition, ways, behavioural patterns of specific people. A people constitutes a religion and religion is the totality of manifestation of a people's life, culture, conduct, tradition and eschatological mission. Thence notions such as "Church" or "State", or religion and secularism, seem to be an *a priori* non-viable distinctions. It does not seem also that the Byzantines were making a distinction between "religious" and "non-religious" people. The expression "atheists" with reference to Muslims did not mean "non-religious", but rather "non-Christians" – those who do not believe in Christ as being God.<sup>29</sup>

The treatment of religion as a wholistic ethnic identification seemed to serve as an insulation against subjecting religion to a detached, "clinical" examination and test. It was a kind of a passing in silence over something which is obvious, but at the same time illusive. It absolved someone from attempting to define one's own or somebody else's religion. The Byzantines did not define Islam, but neither did they refute it as a religion. Rather they attacked the Arabs as Saracens, Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, as the illegitimate sons of Abraham and misguided monotheists; but this is not Islam.

## 2 Religion as an Expression and Measure of Culture

Religion was seen by the Byzantines as a civilizing force and a means of gauging culture. To be religious meant that one had a certain finesse reflected in one's own manners and even in appearance. Sophronius, for example, was shocked at the sight of the conqueror 'Umar. According to one account, Sophronius at his first encounter with 'Umar offered him his own cloak to change into as a proper clothing; a typological comparison between Christianity and Islam? "In truth, this is the abomination of the desolation established in the holy place, which Daniel the prophet spoke of", Sophronius reportedly explained.<sup>30</sup> Other sources, however, portray 'Umar as a sensitive and pious man who asks the aged Patriarch to show him a place to pray, and who then gives Sophronius rights and privileges over the Christian sites and holy places.<sup>31</sup> There is some

29 Cf. Anastasius Sinaites, in F. Nau, "Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai", *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 82.

30 Daniel 9:27; I Maccabees 1:54; 6:7. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p.339.

31 Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 343; Euty chius, *Chronography*, PG 111:907–1156 (in Latin). Ioannis Phokylides, "Ἡ ὄπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου ἀνακαλυφθεῖσα Ἀραβικὴ ἐπιγραφή", *Νέα Σιών* (Jerusalem) 10(1910)262–268, at 263–4. Andreas N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. II (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert Publ., 1972), pp. 81–3. F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

irony in this exchange: the faithful is offering the "infidel" clothes as a token of civilization, while the "infidel" is asking the faithful for a place to pray as a way of expressing and establishing his identity! This is not the only instance in which the barbarian Muslims are used as examples of piety. Gregory Decapolites "Historical Sermon ... About a vision which a Saracen once had and who because of it he believed and became martyr for our lord Jesus Christ"<sup>32</sup> is a telling example of purity of heart which a barbarian Muslim possesses, but a Christian priest is lacking.

As we mentioned earlier, Anastasius Sinaites (c.640–c.700) refers to Muslims as "pagan [Greek] Arabs".<sup>33</sup> In the Narrations of another almost contemporary "Anastasius Sinaites" the Muslim Arabs are referred to in one instance as a "nation" or, according to a later codex of the same narration, as "nations", possibly with the meaning of "pagans", or "barbarians".<sup>34</sup> The same Anastasius calls the Muslims "the Amalek of the desert (ὁ ἐρημικός Ἀμαλήκ) who rose to smite us, the people of Christ".<sup>35</sup> Anastasius makes this characterization as he is condemning Heraclius and his grandson Constans for supporting Monothelism. His statement is in line with the prevailing attitude of the Byzantines of all doctrinal affiliations (Chalcedonians, Monophysites, Nestorians) that the Arab invasions is God's punishment for their own unfaithfulness and heresies; an accusation for which each group held responsible the others.<sup>36</sup>

Maximus the Confessor (580–662), incensed by the Arab conquests, and especially by the attacks of Saracens upon monasteries, used strong language to describe the Muslims as "wild beasts in human form". Indirectly, he was defining Islam as a religion that inspires the Muslims with violence and destruction. The mastery of war does not change the image of the Arab

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1981) pp. 151–2, 322 (nn.287, 288). On the treaty or treaties between 'Umar and Sophronius, see A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, vol. III (1897; rpt. Bruxelles, 1963), pp. 123–333; D.C. Dennett Jr., *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 62–4.

32 PG 100:1201–1212. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas "What an Infidel Saw that a Faithful Did Not: Gregory Dekapolites (d. 824) and Islam", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 (1986), 47–67. See Chapter 23 in this volume.

33 Cf. Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai", pp. 346–7. Nau, "Le texte grec", narration II, p. 61.

34 Stergios Sakkos, *Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναϊτῶν*, Thessalonike, 1964, p. 182.

35 PG 89:1156C.

36 Cf. Question 16, PG 89:476–7. For a discussion of the earliest Christian reaction to the Arab conquests, see Alexander A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1935, 1959); Walter E. Kaegi Jr., "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest", *Church History* 38 (1969) 139–49; John Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions", *Byzantion* 51 (1981), 579–91; D.J. Constantelos, "The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek Sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries", *Byzantion* 42 (1972), 325–57; Brock, "Syriac views", pp. 9–21, notes, 199–203.

Muslims as barbarous people. For Leo VI the Wise (886–912) the Muslims are “the best advised and most prudent in their military operations”, but “*of all the barbarous nations*”.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, therefore, Religion is seen as a measure and test of a people’s civilization. The Arab invasions reinforced such an impression of the Byzantines. Even when conversion takes place from Islam to Christianity, the imprint seems to remain intact. A most interesting case is that of an unknown Muslim who had converted to Christianity, died as a Christian but his name remained unknown. He entered the local martyrologium, and Constantine Acropolites (1217–1282) praised him, as ... “St. Barbarian”!<sup>38</sup>

### 3 *Θρησκεία*. The “Non-European” Concept

Few, if any, are the instances in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature in which the Byzantines are attempting to look at Islam as a spiritual force, beyond the actual experience or the caricature, which they formed or inherited about the Muslims. Two instances, however, need to be noted as exceptions, John of Damascus and Gregory Palamas. John of Damascus’ characterization of Islam as the *σκεία* (superstition, or darkness) *τῶν Ἰσμηλιτῶν* is most likely a copyist’s blunder for the word *θρησκεία* (religion). He is the first controversialist who, indirectly, devised a master concept of criteria by which religion is defined, examined, and contrasted to another religion. His *Fount of Knowledge*, taken as a whole, is for his times a master definition of religion in general and of Orthodox Christianity in particular. It consists of three broad components: a) A terminological preamble in which key “religious” and “theological” categories are explained; something which points to the implication that language contains terms of which some are more fitting than others in expressing *religious* categories. b) A summary description of heresies, or false religious ideas or traditions, which illustrate what [true] religion is not; something which points to the diversity and subjectiveness (thus, inconclusiveness) in evaluating religion. c) A main body of comprehensive statements which constitute the substance of the faith and practice of each religious tradition; something which points to a sense of wholeness and finesse needed to be encapsulated in their most accurate form. Religion, therefore, is presented by John of Damascus (an earliest student of the *Religionswissenschaft*) as a composite phenomenon,

37 *Tactica*, Constitution XVIII.

38 *Text in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ανάλεκτα*, vol. 1, pp. 405–420.

in which no single negative or positive element describes, let alone exhausts, its content and essence. Not only the general framework, but also each of its components is a complexity in itself. Thus in the *Fount of Knowledge*, Islam is one, and a minute, component of the composite sense of Religion, and by itself a microcosm of a complex definition which consists of prehistory, history, sources, doctrine, practices and a critique by its student. John of Damascus' methodology was imitated by later Byzantine anti-Islamic writers but never followed. Of course we have seen that the word *θρησκεία* was used also by Abū Qurra and others, but their purpose was more to refute than to present and explain Islam as a religion. In the way John of Damascus treated Islam, he moved Islam and religion out from the orbit of a racial-political identification of a particular people, to that of an experience of a living faith. The other meaningful characterization of Religion is *θεοσέβεια* (reverence for the divine) which Gregory Palamas used for Islam. Palamas spoke of the Muslims as "the most barbarians among the barbarians", but of Islam (and by implication of Religion) as *θεοσέβεια*; the way in which one expresses one's own awe and reverence to God which may be different from one's manners. Palamas even called upon his own Christian flock in Thessalonike to take notice and imitate this *θεοσέβεια* of the Turks!

The examples of John of Damascus and Gregory Palamas are interesting, and significant: the former because he employs the word in a book of *heresies* in which he includes Hellenism (i.e. paganism), Zoroastrianism, schools of Greek philosophy, Judaism, Gnostic sects, etc; the latter because the characterization comes from someone who as a captive suffered in the hands of the Muslims, abhorred their manners (experienced, that is, manifestations perhaps of their religion as others would have perceived them), but who also discerned that such manners were not necessarily the essential content of Islam as a faith. By making this distinction, Gregory Palamas was indirectly suggesting that the conduct of the followers of a religion does not necessarily define the essence of Religion itself. As a mystic and one who in his theology was keen to distinguish between divine essence and energies, or attributes, he was not inconsistent in this regard! Palamas implied that, ideally, conduct should reflect the essence of Religion; as in the hesychastic theology energies are of, and share in the divine essence itself.

The other consideration is that *θρησκεία* and *θεοσέβεια* came from two spiritual figures, both of whom were intellectual ascetics and mystics. In treating Islam, they were not driven by military, political considerations, or behavioural manifestations, which yield a limited and distorted sense of the essence of a religious tradition. Both of them treated Islam and religion as a spiritual

experience and a way of life. To make such a critical distinction was an even greater challenge during their time in the context of two theocracies battling each other, when religion and social behaviour were seen inseparably and interchangeably.

In summary, Religion although not defined by the Byzantines, is viewed as the substrate of one's own identity, civilization, culture, ethos, morality and practice; it is one's own ground of being. To Byzantines and Muslims alike, Religion was a matter of one's own self-identity and, thus, a matter of life and death! Such a notion of Religion explains the intensity in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature and the ferocity in the Muslim-Byzantine relations.

## Βυζάντιο, Ισλάμ και αντι-Ισλαμική γραμματεία (7<sup>ος</sup>–15<sup>ος</sup> αι.)

Οι δύο κόσμοι, Άραβες και Ισλάμ, μολονότι παράλληλοι και αλληλένδετοι, δεν πρέπει να θεωρηθούν αυτόματα και ταυτόσημοι. Πρίν ακόμη από την εποχή της εμφάνισης του Ισλάμ, στις αρχές του εβδόμου αιώνα, Άραβες ήσαν γνώριμοι στους Βυζαντινούς και η ιστορία σχέσεων Βυζαντίου και Αράβων παρέμεινε συνυφασμένη και περίπλοκη. Στα πλαίσια αυτών των σχέσεων πιο πολυσχιδής και έντονη ήταν η επαφή Βυζαντίου και Ισλάμ. Πολλοί από τους Βυζαντινούς ήσαν Άραβες στην καταγωγή, Χριστιανοί στο θρήσκευμα, χωρίς ποτέ να εξισλαμισθούν. Το Βυζάντιο ήρθε σε επαφή με το Ισλάμ κυρίως μέσω γεγονότων – κυρίως κατακτήσεις, πολέμους, πολιτικές, διπλωματικές αποστολές, μαρτύρια και βίους αγίων – μερικά από αυτά πιο αποκαλυπτικά και εύγλωττα από γραπτές πηγές και συγγράμματα. Η ιστορία σχέσεων Βυζαντίου και Ισλάμ έχει η ίδια πάντως αφήσει πίσω της μία πολύ σημαντική και συγκεκριμένη παράδοση « αντι-Ισλαμικής γραμματείας » με εξίσου αντίστοιχη πολυμορφία και χαρακτήρα όπως τα γεγονότα. Το υλικό του πολυμερούς αυτού κλάδου Ιστορίας, Πολιτισμού, Βυζαντινής Ιστορίας και Ιστορίας Θρησκευμάτων, δεν έχει ακόμη καταχωρηθεί, κωδικοποιηθεί και ερμηνευθεί στην ολότητά του, τόσο από τους « θύραθεν » όσο και από τους « καθ' ημάς » ερευνητές. Γι' αυτό και η σπουδή της γραμματείας αυτής και των πληροφοριών της δεν έχει φτάσει ακόμη στο επίπεδο ωριμότητας και αυτοτέλειας η οποία της ανήκει.

Για την κατανόηση του είδους, του περιεχομένου και του ύφους της Βυζαντινής αντι-Ισλαμικής γραμματείας θα πρέπει κανείς να λάβει υπόψη ορισμένες πρωτόλειες μεν αλλ' αναγκαίες, και κρίσιμες, εισαγωγικές επισημάνσεις τις οποίες οι Βυζαντινοί δεν είχαν ίσως το μηχανισμό, ή την προδιάθεση, να εντοπίσουν και να συνειδητοποιήσουν. Το Ισλάμ, ουσιαστικά δεν είναι « θρησκεία » ή, πολύ περισσότερο, « θρήσκευμα ». Η λέξη ή η έννοια « θρησκεία » σαν ένα επίκτητο συστατικό ή κατασκευάσμα, αποτέλεσμα ανθρώπινης πρωτοβουλίας, πολιτισμού ή ιστορίας, δεν υπάρχει στο Αραβικό λεξιλόγιο. Η λέξη *ισλάμ* (υποταγή) συνιστά στην οντολογία της την έννοια της φυσικής κατάστασης (*fitr*) του ανθρώπου σε σχέση εξάρτησης και υποταγής (*islām*) προς τον Θεό-δημιουργό του. Η έννοια της υποταγής έχει ενεργητική διάθεση (« κάνω υποταγή »): δηλώνει τον τρόπο ζωής (*dīn*) και συμπεριφοράς ενεργούς υποταγής του δημιουργήματος προς τον ένα και μόνο δημιουργό. Επομένως, κατά τους Μουσουλμάνους, το Ισλάμ είναι ο φυσικός τρόπος ζωής (*dīn al-fitrah*) του ανθρώπου, ο τρόπος σχέσης του με τον Θεό (*dīn Illāhi*) ως δημιουργού

των πάντων, ένας τρόπος ζωής τον οποίον ο Θεός έστειλε προφήτες να υπενθυμίσουν και να επιβεβαιώσαν στις κοινωνίες των ανθρώπων, εν τόπω και χρόνω. Η « θρησκεία » του πρώτου ανθρώπου ήταν, κατά φυσικό τρόπο, η Υποταγή (*islām*). Για τους Μουσουλμάνους υπόδειγμα θεληματικά και αβίαστα υποτεταγμένου ανθρώπου (*muslim*, εξελληνισμένο σε μουσουλμάνου) αποτελεί ο Αβραάμ, τον οποίον εξαίρει το Ισλάμ για την υποταγή του στο πρόσταγμα του Θεού να προσφέρει θυσία τον μοναδικό γιό του, χωρίς δισταγμό. Αυτή ή συμπεριφορά του Αβραάμ (*dīn Ibrāhīm*) αποτελεί για τους Μουσουλμάνους ένα κατεξοχήν υπόδειγμα προς μίμηση και τρόπο ζωής. Επομένως η κατάσταση υποταγής του ανθρώπου στον Θεό υπερβαίνει την οποιαδήποτε συμβατική θρησκευτική, η πολιτιστική, ταυτότητά του. Γράφει το Κοράνιο (3:67) για τον Αβραάμ:

Ο Αβραάμ δεν ήταν ούτε Εβραίος, ούτε Χριστιανός. Ήταν δίκαιος· υποτεταγμένος (*muslim*) [στον Θεό]. Οπωσδήποτε δεν ήταν ειδωλολάτρης!

Σύμφωνα πάλι με το Κοράνιο, ο Θεός διαβεβαιώνει τον Μωάμεθ ότι το Ισλάμ το οποίο του παραδίδει είναι η « θρησκεία », ή ο τρόπος ζωής τον οποίον ο ίδιος ο Θεός εξέλεξε, τελειοποίησε και ολοκλήρωσε προς χάρη των ανθρώπων (σούρα 5:3, *al-Mā'idah*).

Όλα αυτά συνιστούν το ουσιώδες και ιδεαλιστικό Ισλάμ. Όμως μία τέτοια θεώρηση και αρχή προσέγγισής του δεν έγινε ποτέ από τους Βυζαντινούς, όπως δεν έχει γίνει ακόμη στην ιστορία των Ισλαμο-Χριστιανικών σχέσεων. Ούτε όμως και οι Μουσουλμάνοι προσέγγισαν ποτέ τον Χριστιανισμό από τη δική του ουσιαστική βάση. Σ' αυτήν την αναδρομή, λοιπόν, δεν θα μιλήσουμε για την προσέγγιση και περιγραφή του Ισλάμ από την οντολογική-ουσιαστική του βάση. Θα μιλήσουμε μάλλον για την προσέγγιση και την αντίδραση των Βυζαντινών προς τη θρησκεία μιας « αδελφότητας πιστών » (*ummah*), όπως τη γνώρισαν, όπως αυτή διαμορφώθηκε από συγκεκριμένα ιστορικά γεγονότα, καταστάσεις, συγκυρίες, ήθη και έθιμα τοπικών κοινωνιών, πολιτισμών και ανθρώπων – όχι πάντοτε, ή απαραίτητα, αντιπροσωπευτικών του ουσιαστικού και ιδεαλιστικού Ισλάμ.

Η εμφάνιση του ιστορικού Ισλάμ και η απαρχή της Μουσουλμανικής κοινότητας είναι γεγονότα (και καρπός) του 7<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα. Για την κατανόηση του ιστορικού Ισλάμ θα μπορούσε να επιλέξει κάποιος μία από τις εξής τρεις αφετηρίες: την περίφημη « Νύχτα της Δύναμης » (*Lailat al-qadr*, όπως την ονομάζει το Κοράνιο στη σούρα 97), τη νύχτα της « γέννησης », ή αποκάλυψης, του λόγου του Θεού κατά την οποίαν ο αρχάγγελος Γαβριήλ εμφανίστηκε στον Μωάμεθ και του απηύθυνε το πρόσταγμα: *iqra* (= « απάγγειλε! », απ' όπου η λέξη Κοράνιο, δηλαδή Απαγγελία) [Βλ., Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh* (London, 1968), 105–6]. Αυτή είναι μία αναφαιρέτη αφετηρία η οποία σηματοδοτεί το γενεσιουργό γεγονός της εν τόπω και χρόνω αποκάλυψης του λόγου του Θεού στον Μωάμεθ· ένα γεγονός το οποίον τοποθετείται στο έτος 610 (ή 612), το τεσσαρακοστό της ηλικίας του Μωάμεθ (570–632). Μία δεύτερη αφετηρία προσέγγισης



και κατανόησης του Ισλάμ θα μπορούσε να είναι η λεγόμενη « φυγή » (*hijrah*) του Μωάμεθ από τη Μέκκα στη Μεδίνα » (στην πραγματικότητα ένας ρηξικέλευθος διαχωρισμός της μικρής και νηπιώδους κοινότητας πιστών από τη θεομαχία των ειδωλολατρών της Μέκκας) η οποία έγινε αιτία εγκαθίδρυσης μιας αμιγούς, διακριτής θεοκεντρικής Μουσουλμανικής κοινότητας στη Μεδίνα. Το κομβικό αυτό γεγονός έλαβε χώρα το έτος 622, έτος απαρχής του Μουσουλμανικού ημερολογίου. Μία τρίτη, αφετηρία προσέγγισης του Ισλάμ θα μπορούσε να είναι αυτή των μεγάλων επεκτατικών κατακτήσεων των Αράβων όταν μέσω αυτών το Ισλάμ σηματοδότησε την παρουσία του στο ευρύτερο πολιτικό, πολιτισμικό, και θρησκευτικό προσκήνιο της Μέσης Ανατολής, ενός χώρου του Βυζαντινού και του Περσικού κράτους. Το 634, δύο μόλις χρόνια μετά το θάνατο του Μωάμεθ, εξαπολύονται από τον δεύτερο « διάδοχο » (*khalifa*) του, τον 'Umar b. al-Khattāb (632–642), οι πρώτες Αραβικές εξορμήσεις κατά της Παλαιστίνης, της Συρίας και της Αιγύπτου, και κατακτώνται ραγδαία οι ζωτικές αυτές επαρχίες της Βυζαντινής αυτοκρατορίας· επαρχίες τις οποίες το Βυζάντιο δεν επανάκτησε ποτέ μόνιμα. Με τις Αραβικές κατακτήσεις το Ισλάμ γίνεται γνωστό πέρα από τα στενά όρια της τεράστιας « νήσου » της Αραβικής χερσονήσου. Αν ήθελε κανείς να χαρακτηρίσει τις τρεις αυτές αφετηρίες θα έλεγε ότι η πρώτη είναι μάλλον θεολογική η οποία απαιτεί και κάποια θρησκευτολογική ανάλυση και κατανόηση του Ισλάμ· η δεύτερη είναι μάλλον θρησκευτικο-κοινωνιολογική η οποία απαιτεί γνώση της ιστορίας και του γενικότερου περιβάλλοντος στο οποίο ανεφύη το Ισλάμ· και η τρίτη αποτελεί την πολιτικο-πολεμική φυσιογνωμία με την οποία πρωτοεμφανίστηκε το Ισλάμ στον έξω κόσμο.

Είναι αυτά τα τελευταία γεγονότα τα οποία οδήγησαν στην άμεση και πρώτη προσέγγιση του Ισλάμ από τους Βυζαντινούς, και η αφετηρία της ιστορίας των Βυζαντινο-Ισλαμικών σχέσεων και της Βυζαντινής αντι-Ισλαμικής γραμματείας. Οι Βυζαντινοί γνώρισαν το Ισλάμ μέσα από τις Αραβικές επιδρομές στο πεδίο της μάχης· και αυτή τη γνωριμία χρησιμοποίησαν ως κύρια αφετηρία και ως χρωστήρα περιγραφής και ερμηνείας του Ισλάμ. Οι Αραβικές κατακτήσεις είναι αυτές οι οποίες, με ελάχιστες εξαιρέσεις, καθόρισαν το είδος και το ύφος της μετέπειτα Βυζαντινής αντι-Ισλαμικής γραμματείας, βασισμένες μάλιστα σε τέτοιες μεταγενέστερες και απομακρυσμένες από τα γεγονότα μαρτυρίες όπως αυτές της *Χρονογραφίας* του Θεοφάνη του Ομολογητή (706–817) [έκδ., Carolus de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia* (Lipsiae, 1883)].

Ένα τέτοιο γενικό συμπέρασμα δεν είναι, πάντως, ούτε απόλυτο ούτε καθολικό. Μία πιο ενδελεχής έρευνα αποκαλύπτει ένα φάσμα θεώρησης του Ισλάμ και σχέσεων Βυζαντινών και Μουσουλμάνων, εκτεινόμενο από τη νηφαλιότητα και το διάλογο, μέχρι την εμπάθεια και την παράκρουση. Σ' αυτό συνέτειναν περισσότερο ιστορικοί, πολιτικοί αλλά και προσωπικοί παράγοντες, και λιγότερο θρησκευτικοί ή πνευματικοί λόγοι. Η Βυζαντινή στάση έναντι του Ισλάμ, αν και στη βάση της πολεμική, είναι ποιοτικά διαφορετική από εκείνη της Δύσης. Το Βυζάντιο έχει να επιδείξει πολύ λιγότερες εκφράσεις τυφλής μισαλλοδοξίας από εκείνες της Δύσης και περισσότερες

ενάργειας, κριτικής θεώρησης και θεολογικής-πνευματικής προσέγγισης του Ισλάμ και αυτό λόγω της γειννίας, της συγγένειας, της ψυχολογικής γνωριμίας και επαφής, της βαθύτερης κατανόησης της νοοτροπίας μεγάλου μέρους των Βυζαντινών με τους εκφραστές του Ισλάμ.

Οι πληθυσμοί των ανατολικών Βυζαντινών επαρχιών της Παλαιστίνης και της Συρίας, οι οποίες πρώτες κατακτήθηκαν από τους Μουσουλμάνους Άραβες, είχαν εντονότερη Αραβική και Συριακή και λιγότερο Ελληνική συνείδηση και νοοτροπία. Την εποχή της εμφάνισης του Ισλάμ οι ανατολικοί αυτοί Βυζαντινοί βρίσκονταν στο προσκήνιο των γραμμάτων, της φιλοσοφίας, της ρητορικής, της θεολογίας και της εκκλησιαστικής πνευματικότητας. Αυτοί ήταν οι πρώτοι οι οποίοι ήρθαν σε άμεση επαφή με το Ισλάμ, το αναμόγχευσαν και το επηρέασαν πολλαπλά. Είναι γι' αυτόν το λόγο για τον οποίον ο χαρακτηρισμός του εβδόμου και ογδόου αιώνα από μία μερίδα Βυζαντινολόγων ως οι « σκοτεινοί αιώνες του Βυζαντίου » με κριτήρια την Ελληνικότητα του Βυζαντίου, την παρακμή των αρχαίων πόλεων, του αστικού τρόπου ζωής και τη διακοπή της κλασικίζουσας ιστοριογραφίας, πρέπει να κριθεί αδίκιμος, ή μη περιεκτικός καθότι, μεταξύ άλλων, υποβαθμίζει τις επαρχίες αυτές και τα επιτεύγματά τους στον τομέα της χρονογραφίας, της αγιολογίας, της υμνογραφίας, της απολογητικής, της ρητορικής, ή διαλεκτικής. Σε όλους αυτούς τους τομείς οι Ανατολικοί Βυζαντινοί επέδειξαν πρωτοτυπία, εφευρετικότητα, προσαρμοστικότητα, και βαθύτατο μυστικό πνεύμα – στοιχεία τα οποία διαπότισαν και χαρακτήρισαν το Βυζαντινό πολιτισμό. Η έκφραση « σκοτεινοί αιώνες » του Βυζαντίου, κάτω μάλιστα από το φως των Ισλαμικών σπουδών, βρίσκεται σήμερα υπό αναθεώρηση [Βλ. τη δωδεκάτομη σειρά *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (1992-)]! Αδίκιμος επίσης πρέπει να κριθεί και ο αποχαρακτηρισμός των Ανατολικών επαρχιών μετά την Αραβική κατάκτησή τους ως Βυζαντινών. Η Βυζαντινή φυσιογνωμία των επαρχιών αυτών επισκιάστηκε μεν εξαιτίας των Αραβικών κατακτήσεων και των εξισλαμισμών, αλλ' η Βυζαντινή τους συνείδηση δεν εξαλείφθηκε.

Πρέπει να τονίσουμε ότι « Άραβες » (από τη λέξη *arab* = νομάς) είναι ονομασία ενδεικτική όχι εθνικότητας αλλά του νομαδικού τρόπου ζωής και συγκρότησης φυλών της ερήμου – καθόλου άγνωστη στους λαούς της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου. « Άραβες » (άγνωστον υπό ποια συγκεκριμένη έννοια) απαντώνται στην Καινή Διαθήκη και συγκαταλέγονται ανάμεσα σ' εκείνους οι οποίοι ασπάστηκαν πρώτοι το κήρυγμα του ευαγγελίου από το στόμα του Πέτρου την ημέρα της Πεντηκοστής (Πράξεις, 2:11), και από τον Παύλο μετέπειτα (Γάλ. 1:17, 4:25). Στα σύνορα μεταξύ της Βυζαντινής και Περσικής αυτοκρατορίας Αραβικοί πληθυσμοί υπηρέτησαν τις δύο αντιμαχόμενες παρατάξεις ως σύμμαχοι της πρώτης (οι μονοφυσίτες Γασανίδες) ή ως σύμμαχοι της δεύτερης (οι Νεστοριανοί Λαχμίτες). Πολύ πριν από την εμφάνιση του Ισλάμ οι Βυζαντινοί γνώριζαν τους Άραβες και ως *Αγαρηνούς*, *Σαρακηνούς*, ή *Ισμαηλίτες* – ονομασίες με Παλαιοδιαθητικές καταβολές. Με την εμφάνιση του Ισλάμ πολλοί ερμήνευσαν αντιρρητικά τα ονόματα αυτά με κάποια φαντασία για να χαρακτηρίσουν τους Μουσουλμάνους ως σπέρμα μεν Αβραάμ αλλ' ως νόθους απογόνους του

προερχόμενους από τη δούλη του Άγαρ (*Αγαρηνοί*), αμέτοχους και « κενούς » από τη χάρη της Σάρρας (*Σαρρα-κηνούς*, κατά την ετυμολογία του Δαμασκηνού) τη νόμιμη σύζυγο του Αβραάμ, και ως απογόνους του νόθου Ισμαήλ (*Ισμαηλίτες*)! Πρώιμες νύξεις ή αναφορές στους Άραβες, όχι όμως σαφώς ως Μουσουλμάνους, βρίσκουμε σε διάφορα προ-Ισλαμικά ή πρώιμα Ισλαμικά Βυζαντινά κείμενα, όπως στο *Λειμών* του Ιωάννη Μόσχου (550–619) και του συνεργάτη του Σωφρόνιου του Σοφιστή (560–638), του μετέπειτα Πατριάρχη Ιεροσολύμων (634–38), στο *Βίο του (Ιωάννου) Ιωάννη του Ελεήμονα* Πατριάρχη Αλεξάνδρειας (610–19) από τον Λεόντιο επίσκοπο Νεαπόλεως Κύπρου (590–ca. 650), στον Αναστάσιο Σιναΐτη (+ca. 700), και στις επιστολές του *Μάξιμου του Ομολογητή* (580–662), του οποίου ο διωγμός είχε να κάνει τόσο με τη θεολογική του ομολογία κατά του μονοθελητισμού, όσο (αν όχι περισσότερο) και με την κριτική την οποίαν άσκησε κατά της πολιτικής της Βυζαντινής αυλής έναντι των Αράβων. Παρ' όλα αυτά για τους Βυζαντινούς η πρώτη εντύπωση της Ισλαμικής πίστης των Αράβων δεν θεωρήθηκε διάφορη, ή παντελώς ασύμβατη, προς τη Χριστιανική παράδοση. Ο Ιωάννης ο Δαμασκηνός, μεγάλος Πατέρας της Εκκλησίας, συστηματικός θεολόγος, υμνογράφος, Αραβόφωνας Σύρος ο ίδιος, συμπεριέλαβε και περιέγραψε το Ισλάμ στο *Περί αίρέσεων* βιβλίο του ως « αίρεσιν τῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν »! Οι σχέσεις επομένως των Βυζαντινών με τους Άραβες, αλλά και οι ρίζες της Βυζαντινής αντι-Ισλαμικής γραμματείας απλώνονται πολύ βαθειά στο ιστορικό και ψυχολογικό υπέδαφος.

Εφόσον οι Αραβικές κατακτήσεις απετέλεσαν κομβικό στοιχείο επαφής και τον καταλύτη σχέσεων μεταξύ Βυζαντινών και Ισλάμ, είναι ανάγκη να σταθούμε και να σκιαγραφήσουμε σύντομα τη φάση αυτή. Σε διάστημα μόλις δεκατεσσάρων ετών από το θάνατο του Μωάμεθ (632) τα κέντρα του Χριστιανισμού στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο βρέθηκαν στα χέρια των Αράβων. Το 635 παραδόθηκε η Δαμασκός στο στρατηγό Khālid b. al-Walīd από τον « επίσκοπο » της πόλης, στην πραγματικότητα παππού του Ιωάννη του Δαμασκηνού, Sargūn b. Mansūr, [al-Baladhūri, 172, 187]. Δύομιση χρόνια αργότερα (το 638) η Ιερουσαλήμ παραδόθηκε στο χαλίφη 'Umar b. al-Khattāb από τον Πατριάρχη Σωφρόνιο. Το ίδιο έτος παραδόθηκε και η Έδεσσα. Οκτώ χρόνια αργότερα (το 646) παραδόθηκε στο στρατηγό 'Amr b. al-'Ās η Αλεξάνδρεια από τον μονοφυσίτη Πατριάρχη Βενιαμίν [*The Chronicle of John* (c. 690 AD), *Coptic Bishop of Nikiu*]. Ο Σωφρόνιος ερμηνεύει την πτώση της Ιερουσαλήμ ως τιμωρία του Θεού για τις αμαρτίες των Χριστιανών, ενώ ο μονοφυσίτης επίσκοπος Νικίου θεωρεί κι' αυτός την πτώση της Αλεξάνδρειας ως θεία τιμωρία, την αποδίδει όμως στη δυοφυσιτική αίρεση στην οποίαν κατ' αυτόν είχε πέσει η Εκκλησία με τη σύνοδο της Χαλκηδόνας. Δεν πρέπει να διαφεύγει εδώ της προσοχής του αναγνώστη ούτε η σειρά κατάκτησης ούτε η σημασία αυτών των πόλεων. Πρέπει επίσης να επισημανθεί ότι τα μεγάλα αυτά ανατολικά κέντρα του Βυζαντίου δεν κατακτήθηκαν αλλά παραδόθηκαν από τους τοπικούς ηγέτες τους στους Άραβες (και μάλιστα, σε μερικές περιπτώσεις, με κάποια ανακούφιση) για να εξασφαλιστεί η συνέχεια της αστικής και θρησκευτικής ζωής των κατοίκων και η καλύτερη διαβίωσή

τους υπό Αραβική κυριαρχία! Η βαθεία δυσαρέσκεια των Ανατολικών Βυζαντινών προς τους « Ρωμηούς » (*al-rūm*) Βυζαντινούς λόγω των δογματικών διαφορών μαζί τους, ή η βαριά φορολογία η οποία τους είχε επιβληθεί, και οι δοκιμασίες τις οποίες είχαν υποστεί λόγω των μακροχρόνιων πολέμων των Βυζαντινών με τους Πέρσες, οι οποίοι πόλεμοι είχαν μετατρέψει τα εδάφη τους σε πεδία μάχης, είχαν οδηγήσει σε μία ψυχολογική αλλοτρίωση των μεν από τους δε, κάτι το οποίο διευκόλυνε τα μέγιστα το επεκτατικό σύνδρομο των νεοφώτιστων Μουσουλμάνων. Οι Άραβες εκμεταλλεύτηκαν δυναμικά το κενό και την αποδυνάμωση των δύο αυτοκρατοριών. Η συνεκτική δύναμη την οποία δημιούργησε το Ισλάμ ανάμεσα στους πιστούς του συνέτεινε στην επιτυχία των Αραβικών κατακτήσεων, μολονότι το κίνητρο των Αραβικών επιδρομών δεν ήταν αυτή καθεαυτή η επέκτασή του Ισλάμ ως θρησκείας. Το Ισλάμ διαμόρφωνε και πρόσφερε στις διάσπαρτες νομαδικές φυλές, για πρώτη φορά, μία δική τους ταυτότητα: μία νεοφανή πολιτική, κοινωνική, πολιτιστική αυτογνωσία, εκπεφρασμένη σε ένα κοινό κώδικα ζωής, καταγεγραμμένο σε μία κοινή γλώσσα, η οποία σύμφωνα με την κοινή τους πίστη ήταν η αυτούσια γλώσσα και βουλή του Θεού-δημιουργού. Το Ισλάμ δημιούργησε στους Άραβες νομάδες τη βάση για να ενωθούν μεταξύ τους σε μία συμπαγή αδελφότητα πιστών (*umma*) και να διεκδικήσουν μία θέση στο διεθνές προσκήνιο των μεγάλων λαών και πολιτισμών της εποχής.

Σε δύο τουλάχιστον πανηγυρικούς λόγους του ο Σωφρόνιος, Πατριάρχης Ιεροσολύμων (634–38), υπαινίσσεται τις Αραβικές κατακτήσεις στην Παλαιστίνη αναφερόμενος σε επιδρομές « βαρβάρων μὲν ἀπάντων, μάλιστα δὲ Σαρακηνῶν ». Στο Λόγο του επί τη εορτή των Χριστουγέννων το 634 [έκδ., Hermann Usener, “Weihnachtspredigt des Sophronios”, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 41 (1886), 500–16], τον οποίον εκφώνησε όχι από τη Βηθλεέμ αλλά από το ναό της Θεοτόκου στην Ιερουσαλήμ, αναφέρει το γεγονός ότι οι Χριστιανοί βρίσκονται σε αποκλεισμό και δεν μπορούν να γιορτάσουν τη γέννηση του Χριστού στη γενέτειρά του από τον φόβο των Αράβων οι οποίοι την έχουν καταλάβει. Στον άλλο Λόγο του επί τη εορτή των Επιφανείων το 637 [έκδ., Α. Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμεύς, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, τ. V (Brussels, 1963), σσ. 151–68], αναφέρεται πάλι σε επιδρομές βαρβάρων και αποδίδει τα δεινά των Χριστιανῶν « εἰς τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν ». Οι « βάρβαροι » είναι οι Άραβες. Δεν φαίνεται όμως να τους γνωρίζει και ως Μουσουλμάνους. Το όνομα του Σωφρονίου συνδέεται με μία συγκινητική, κατά πρόσωπο επαφή με τον χαλίφη των Μουσουλμάνων Ὑμαρ b. al-Khattāb στον οποίον ο Πατριάρχης παρέδωσε αυτοπροσώπως την Ιερουσαλήμ. Αν και η ιστορικότητά της δεν είναι απόλυτα κατοχυρωμένη, τη συνάντηση αυτή περιγράφει ο Άραβας χρονικογράφος, γιατρός και Μελχίτης Πατριάρχης Αλεξανδρείας, Saʿīd Ibn Batrīq (935–40), γνωστός ως Ευτύχιος [*Eutychii patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, έκδ., L. Cheiko, (Beirut, 1906–9)]. Ο γηραιός και απογοητευμένος Ηράκλειος είχε κωφεύσει στις παρακλήσεις τού ακόμη γηραιότερου Πατριάρχη ν' αποστείλει στην Παλαιστίνη στρατιωτική βοήθεια κατά των Αράβων. Ο Σωφρόνιος, πεπεισμένος

ότι ήταν προς το συμφέρον των Χριστιανών και των μνημείων της Αγίας Πόλης να παραδώσει την πόλη, γνωστοποίησε στον πολιορκητή της Άραβα στρατηγό Abū 'Ubayda τις προθέσεις του υπό τον όρο ότι δεν θα παρέδιδε την πόλη σε άλλον πλην του « ηγέτη των πιστών » (*amir al-muminin*), και αυτό προσωπικά. Από το πεδίο της μάχης στη Συρία όπου βρισκόταν ο 'Umar καταφτάνει στο όρος των Ελαιών, ελεεινός και ρακένδυτος φορώντας ένα βρώμικο ένδυμα από τρίχες καμήλας. Στο θέαμά του ο εβδομηνταοκτάχρονος Πατριάρχης βγάζει το πανωφόρι του (το ράσο του;) και το προσφέρει στον σαραντάχρονο και ρωμαλέο 'Umar. Ο 'Umar, τον οποίον οι Ισλαμικές και Χριστιανικές Συριακές πηγές εκθειάζουν για την ευγένεια χαρακτήρα, την ευσέβεια και τη βαθειά θρησκευτικότητα του, δέχεται τη φιλόφρονα προσφορά του Πατριάρχη, τον οποίον και αυτόν συνόδευε μία ανάλογη παράδοση χαρακτήρα και προσωπικότητας. Το θέαμα του Άραβα « αρχηγού των πιστών » στο ράσο του Χριστιανού Πατριάρχη μιλάει έμμεσα αλλά εύγλωττα για τις σχέσεις ανατολικών Χριστιανών με τους Άραβες, τουλάχιστον στην πολύ πρώιμη εποχή! Μετά την υποδοχή οι διαπραγματεύσεις συνεχίστηκαν στο αίθριο του Ναού της Αναστάσεως. Εκεί κάποια στιγμή, διαπιστώνοντας ότι είχε φτάσει η ώρα της απογευματινής προσευχής, ο 'Umar ζήτησε από τον Πατριάρχη να του υποδείξει ένα κατάλληλο τόπο για να προσευχηθεί. Ο Πατριάρχης δεν έδειξε καμία έκπληξη από το αίτημα. Υπέδειξε αμέσως στον 'Umar τον Ναό της Αναστάσεως έξω από τον οποίον βρίσκονταν. Ο 'Umar αρνήθηκε την προσφορά με το δικαιολογητικό ότι κάτι τέτοιο θα έδινε το δικαίωμα στους απογόνους του να διεκδικήσουν τον Ναό ως δικό τους. Έτσι προτίμησε τα σκαλοπάτια του Ναού. Μετά την Ιερουσαλήμ η πομπή κατευθύνθηκε στη Βηθλεέμ. Και εκεί, όταν έφτασε η ώρα της επόμενης (ή μεθεπόμενης) περιόδου της Μουσουλμανικής προσευχής, έλαβε χώρα η ίδια σκηνή. Ο Σωφρόνιος υπέδειξε στον 'Umar το ναό της Γεννήσεως, τον οποίον ο χαλίφης δεν αποδέχθηκε για τον ίδιο λόγο. Η διήγηση αυτή, έστω κι' αν τυχόν κατασκευάστηκε μεταγενέστερα για να διασφαλίσει τα προνόμια των Χριστιανών επί των αγίων τόπων από τους Εβραίους και τους Μουσουλμάνους Άραβες, δεν θα μπορούσε να είχε επιζηήσει ούτε να φέρει την υπογραφή του λόγιου Πατριάρχη Ευτύχιου, αν δεν στηριζόταν τουλάχιστον σε κάποια κοινή παράδοση περί δύο βαθύτατα ευαίσθητων και πιστών πρωτεργατών, όπως του Σωφρονίου και του 'Umar.

Πέρα από σπάνιες και τέτοιου είδους προσωπικές επαφές, γενικά η εμφάνιση ενός νεοφανούς προφήτη και ενός κατακτητικού Ισλάμ ανησύχησαν βαθύτατα τους Βυζαντινούς. Στην προσπάθειά τους να καταλάβουν το νόημα μιας τέτοιας λαίλαπας η οποία απειλούσε ένα θεοκεντρικό Βυζάντιο, πολλοί κατέφυγαν σε ερμηνείες αποκαλυπτικού χαρακτήρα. Παραδείγματα η *Αποκάλυψη του ψευδο-Μεθοδίου* η οποία αποδίδεται μεν αναχρονιστικά στον Μεθόδιο επίσκοπο Πατάρων (+ 311) αλλά γράφτηκε από κάποιον άγνωστο Σύρο συγγραφέα μεταξύ των ετών 655–74 [έκδ. B. M. Istrin, "Otokrovenie Mefodija Patarskago i Apokrificheskiiia Videnia Daniela u Vizantiiski i Slaviano-Russkoi Literaturakh", στο *Chteniia u Imperateorskoi*

*Obshchestvie Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom Universitetie*, Number 193 (Moscow, 1897), 27–31]· ή οι χρησμοί περί του Μωάμεθ και το μέλλον του Ισλάμ, αποδιδόμενοι στον μαθηματικό, φιλόσοφο και μουσικό Στέφανο Αλεξανδρείας [Hermann Usener, *Kleine Schriften*, τ. 3 (Bonn, 1880), 247–322].

Στον ίδιον αιώνα της εμφάνισης του Ισλάμ, και των Αραβικών κατακτήσεων, γεννιέται αυτός ο οποίος θα ζήσει από κοντά και για πρώτη φορά θα περιγράψει το Ισλάμ ως θρησκεία, ή μάλλον ως « αΐρεση των Ίσμαηλιτών » – ο Αριστοτελικός συστηματικός θεολόγος, υμνογράφος και ποιητής, Σύρος την καταγωγή, από τους μεγαλύτερους Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας Ανατολής και Δύσης, Ιωάννης ο Δαμασκηνός (ca.650/2–ca.750). Η ζωή του συμπίπτει με τη δυναστεία των Ουμαγιαδών (661–749) η οποία για πρώτη φορά κυβερνά την Ισλαμική κοινότητα έξω από τα όρια της Αραβικής χερσονήσου, σε μια ανθούσα Ελληνιστική πόλη της Συρίας, τη Δαμασκό, τη γενέτειρα του Ιωάννη! Ο παππούς του είχε παραδώσει την πόλη στον Ύμαρ (636) και αυτή, ύστερα από είκοσι πέντε χρόνια, έγινε η επί ένα σχεδόν αιώνα πρωτεύουσα της αναδυόμενης αυτοκρατορίας των Αράβων Μουσουλμάνων. Ο πατέρας του Δαμασκηνού, Mansūr b. Sargūn, υπηρέτησε στην αυλή των Ουμαγιαδών ως « σύμβουλος » επί των οικονομικών, ό,τι κι αν σήμαινε ακριβώς ο τίτλος. Ο Ιωάννης ανατράφηκε στην αυλή του χαλίφη, και διετέλεσε συνδαιτυμόνας του νεαρού Yazīd του μετέπειτα χαλίφη Yazīd I (680–83) και του Χριστιανού ποιητή της αυλής Akhtal. Ένας ανώνυμος Βίος αναφέρει ότι ύστερα από πίεση του φιλομαθούς Ιωάννη, ο πατέρας του Δαμασκηνού ζήτησε από τον χαλίφη Mu‘awiyah (661–80) να επιτρέψει στον Σικελό μοναχό Κοσμά να αναλάβει την Ελληνική παιδεία του γιου του ώστε να μορφωθεί « μη μόνον από τὰς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν βίβλους » – κάτι το οποίο δείχνει ότι η πρώτη του παιδεία ήταν αυτή της αυλής η οποία περιλάμβανε ασφαλώς και την εκμάθηση του Κορανίου! Όντως ο Κοσμάς δίδαξε τον Ιωάννη φιλοσοφία, ρητορική, φυσική, αριθμητική, γεωμετρία, μουσική, αστρονομία και θεολογία εισάγοντάς τον έτσι στο Βυζαντινό εκπαιδευτικό πρόγραμμα. Ο Ιωάννης αντικατέστησε τον πατέρα του στο οικονομικό πόστο των Ουμαγιαδών. Εκεί υπηρέτησε επί τουλάχιστον είκοσι πέντε χρόνια (από το 691/5 μέχρι λίγο πριν το 726). Το ενδεχόμενο, όπως έχει προταθεί, ότι η θέση του συμβούλου επί των οικονομικών συμπεριελάμβανε και το χαρτοφυλάκιο του υπουργού πολέμου είναι ιδιαίτερα ενδιαφέρον αν αυτό ήταν στα χέρια ενός Χριστιανού, σε περίοδο μάλιστα Αραβικών κατακτήσεων!

Το κύρος του Δαμασκηνού και η επίδρασή του επί των Ισλαμο-Χριστιανικών σχέσεων συνεχίζει να προσελκύει μέχρι σήμερα το ενδιαφέρον της ακαδημαϊκής κοινότητας. Το σύντομο κεφάλαιο (αριθ. 100/1) του *Περί Αιρέσεων*, αφιερωμένο στη « [θρη]σκεία των Ίσμαηλιτών » και μία εξίσου σύντομη « Διάλεξις Σαρακηνού και Χριστιανού » [έκδ. P. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, τ. IV (Berlin, 1981), 60–67, 426–38, και PG 94:764–73, [94:1585–96], 96:1335–48] καταλαμβάνουν ελάχιστες σελίδες στο πλαίσιο του εκτενούς συγγραφικού του έργου. Εντούτοις, ο χρόνος, το είδος και κυρίως το περιεχόμενο των δύο αυτών κειμένων

καθιστούν τη σύντομη αυτή συγγραφή πρωτοποριακή, τόσο για τη Χριστιανική όσο και για την Ισλαμική γραμματεία. Το πρώτο κείμενο συνιστά μία συνοπτική, ισόρροπη, ενημερωτική και εύπεπτη εισαγωγή, την πρώτη ίσως περί του Ισλάμ. Κατά παραδειγματικά θρησκευολογικό τρόπο ο Δαμασκηνός καλύπτει συστηματικά όλο το εύρος του Ισλάμ ως θρησκευτικής παράδοσης, χωρίς ανακρίβειες, στρεβλώσεις, υπερβολές, φανατισμούς, ή πολώσεις. Αρχίζει με μία σύντομη αναφορά στις θρησκευτικές δοξασίες και πράξεις των Αράβων κατά την προ-Ισλαμική περίοδο· μιλάει για τον Μωάμεθ ως Άρειανό αιρετικό (μία περισσότερο διειδυτική και σωστή διαπίστωση από τους περισσότερους Βυζαντινούς οι χαρακτηρίζουν τον Μωάμεθ ως Νεστοριανό) με κάποια επιπόλαιη γνώση της Παλαιάς και Καινής Διαθήκης· περιγράφει με ακρίβεια τη θεολογία του Ισλάμ ως ένα δυναμικό μοναρχιανισμό· μεταφράζει κατά γράμμα δύο από τα σημαντικότερα χωρία του Κορανίου στο θέμα αυτό (σούρα 96:1 *al-'Alaq*, και σούρα 112 *al-Tawhid*)· συνοψίζει με λεπτομέρεια την περί Χριστού διδασκαλία του Κορανίου· εκθέτει το θέμα της προφητολογίας εξασκώντας έντονη αντιρρητική κατά του Μωάμεθ ως προφήτη· αμύνεται του Τριαδικού δόγματος ανατρέποντας τη Μουσουλμανική κατηγορία ότι οι Χριστιανοί είναι «Έταιριασταί», ότι δηλαδή προσάπτουν εταίρο, ή μέτοχο, στον ένα και μοναδικό Θεό επειδή πιστεύουν στον Χριστό ως Υιόν του Θεού· αναφέρεται σε πρακτικά θέματα πολιτείας και ηθικής των Μουσουλμάνων· κατονομάζει δύο άλλες πολύ βασικές σούρες-ενότητες του Κορανίου [την αριθ. 5, *al-Mā'idah* («Ή στρωμένη τράπεζα») και την αριθ. 2, *al-Baqarah* («Ή βούς») την εκτενέστερη του Κορανίου), και τελειώνει απαριθμώντας μερικές βασικές πρακτικές του Ισλάμ, όπως την περιτομή, την κατάργηση του Σαββάτου και του βαπτίσματος, την αλλαγή των Ιουδαϊκών διατροφικών νόμων, και την απαγόρευση αλκοολούχων ποτών. Ο Δαμασκηνός χειρίζεται το Ισλάμ ως *Ιουδαιο-Χριστιανική* αίρεση. Στην περιγραφή αυτή μπορεί κάποιος ενημερωμένος Μουσουλμάνος να συγκατανεύσει, με ελάχιστες μόνο διορθωτικές παρεμβάσεις, και να αναγνωρίσει εύκολα την πίστη του – κριτήριο έγκυρης θρησκευολογικής προσέγγισης! Ο Δαμασκηνός γνώριζε και αντιλαμβανόταν το Ισλάμ καλύτερα από τον μέσο Μουσουλμάνο της εποχής του.

Χωρίς να περιπέσει σε στείρα πολεμική, ή σε μοιρολατρία, ο Δαμασκηνός αντιμετώπισε τη νέα πραγματικότητα την οποία διαμόρφωνε το Ισλάμ ως πρόκληση για να εκθέσει τις διαφορές ουσίας μεταξύ Χριστιανισμού και Ισλάμ, και να προσφέρει στη Χριστιανική κοινότητα αντίδοτα επιβίωσης. Επί των ημερών του η Μονή του αγίου Σάββα στην έρημο της Ιουδαίας, στην οποία αποσύρθηκε, έγινε εργαστήριο και κέντρο πνευματικής αναγέννησης. Εκεί ο Δαμασκηνός με ένα κύκλο μαθητών του επιδόθηκε σε ένα μεγαλόπνοο, θεολογικό, υμνολογικό, αγιολογικό και απολογητικό συγγραφικό έργο. Μεταξύ των άλλων συνέθεσε την *Πηγή Γνώσεως*, την πρώτη «συστηματική θεολογία» του Χριστιανισμού, ένα μνημειώδες έργο αποτελούμενο από τρία μέρη, τα *Φιλοσοφικά κεφάλαια*, το *Περί Αίρέσεων* – δύο προαναγγελτικά του τρίτου και κυρίως θέματος – και το *Περί τής Όρθοδόξου Πίστεως*. Στο *Περί Αίρέσεων*

μέρος, βασισμένο στο *Πανάριον* του Επιφανίου Κύπρου (+ 404), πρόσθεσε τις σύγχρονες προς την εποχή του αιρέσεις των Μασσαλιανών, του Ισλάμ και της Εικονομαχίας. Πολύ νωρίς η *Πηγή Γνώσεως*, όπως και άλλα έργα του Δαμασκηνού, όλα στα Ελληνικά, μεταφράστηκαν στα Αραβικά και έγιναν εύχρηστα μέσα στα χέρια των Αραβόφωνων Χριστιανών, αλλά και των Μουσουλμάνων θεολόγων. Οι τελευταίοι ανακάλυψαν σ' αυτά τον τρόπο της Αριστοτελικής σκέψης και μεθοδολογίας. Οι τίτλοι και η μέθοδος τέτοιων βασικών εγχειριδίων Ισλαμικής θεολογίας, όπως η *al-Ibāna 'an usūl al-dīyāna* (*Η Διαφώτιση των αρχών της πίστεως*) του al-Ash'arī (873/4–935), πατέρα της Ισλαμικής συστηματικής θεολογίας, ή του Samarqandī, *Usul al-dīn* (*Αρχές πίστεως, ή Θεολογία*), ή του 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb usūl al-dīn* (*Βιβλίο αρχών πίστεως*), ή του Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1209), *Ma'ālim usūl al-dīn* (*Η Γνώση των αρχών της πίστεως*) όχι απλώς δεν είναι συμπωματικοί, αλλά προδίδουν μέσω του al-Ash'arī ως πηγή τους τον Ιωάννη τον Δαμασκηνό! Λιγότερο από διακόσια χρόνια μετά την έκδοση της *Πηγής Γνώσεως* θα μπορούσε να φανταστεί κάποιος τον al-Ash'arī να συγγράφει τη δική του συστηματική θεολογία έχοντας δίπλα του για οδηγό το αντίστοιχο *opus magnum* του Δαμασκηνού. Αλλιώς δεν εξηγείται και αυτή ακόμη η διαίρεση του έργου του σε τρία πανομοιότυπα μέρη: « Αιρέσεις », « Φιλοσοφικά », « Περί της Ορθόδοξης Πίστεως »! Η σειρά των μερών του al-Ash'arī δεν έχει καμία σημασία καθότι η χειρόγραφη παράδοση των έργων του Δαμασκηνού δίνει διάφορες διατάξεις των μερών της *Πηγής Γνώσεως*.

Η επίδραση του Δαμασκηνού και της Ανατολικής θεολογίας ίσως να είναι ακόμη βαθύτερη στην αντίστοιχη Ισλαμική θεολογία. Την εποχή του Δαμασκηνού η νεαρή Μουσουλμανική κοινότητα ταλανιζόταν από δύο εκ διαμέτρου αντίθετες θεολογικές παρατάξεις, με έντονες πάντα πολιτικές διαστάσεις. Η μία κήρυττε ότι ο άνθρωπος ενεργεί κάτω από τον απόλυτο προορισμό της θείας βουλής (ή καταναγκασμό, *jabr*), απ' όπου η παράταξη έγινε γνωστή ως *Jabriyah*. Την αντίληψη αυτή εκμεταλλεύονταν συχνά συγκεντρωτικοί πολιτικοί ηγέτες για να πούν ότι ενεργούν κατά προσταγή του Θεού! Η άλλη παράταξη διατεινόταν ότι ο άνθρωπος ενεργεί με δική του πρωτοβουλία ασκώντας τη δική του δύναμη (*qadar*, ή αυτεξούσιο), απ' όπου η ονομασία *Qadariyah* για την αντίστοιχη παράταξη. Για την *Qadariyah* κάθε άνθρωπος είναι υπεύθυνος των πράξεών του. Και οι δύο θέσεις, με τον τρόπο με τον οποίον διατυπώνονταν, θεωρούνταν ακραίες και « αιρετικές » χωρίς όμως να έχει διατυπωθεί μέχρι τότε η ορθόδοξη θέση. Ο al-Ash'arī ως « ορθολογιστής » (*Mu'tazila*) ανήκε στη δεύτερη παράταξη. Η αποφαιτική θεολογία και η περί αυτεξούσιου ισόρροπη διδασκαλία του Δαμασκηνού οδήγησαν τον al-Ash'arī στη γενικά αποδεκτή σύνθεσή του, γνωστή ως « *kasb-iktisab* », δηλαδή στην ελεύθερη αποδοχή εκ μέρους του ανθρώπου της προγνωστικής (όχι επιβεβλημένης) δύναμης του Θεού! Πρέπει να τονίσουμε στο σημείο αυτό ότι τόσο η Ανατολική Ορθόδοξη όσο και η Ισλαμική θεολογία (ή μάλλον, ανθρωπολογία) δεν κάνουν λόγο περί ελευθερίας της βουλήσεως αλλά, πιο σωστά και με πανομοιότυπο τρόπο, περί αυτεξουσίου



(*qadar*) του ανθρώπου, δηλαδή περί δυνατότητας του ανθρώπου να ενεργεί όπως θέλει – έννοια με πολύ βαθύτερες ανθρωπολογικές ηθικές διαστάσεις και τυχόν πολιτικές προεκτάσεις! Η διατύπωση της ορθόδοξης Ισλαμικής θεολογίας στο θέμα αυτό, όπως και σε άλλα θέματα πίστεως, έγινε από τον al-Ash'arī ύστερα από συγχώνευση απόλυτων θέσεων με μία ορθολογική διαμόρφωση η οποία βεβαίως την πίστη και ερμήνευε τη λογική της. Ο al-Ash'arī θεωρείται ως ο πατέρας της Ορθόδοξης (*sunni*) Ισλαμικής θεολογίας.

Η διορατικότητα του Δαμασκηνού τον οδήγησε στο να θωρακίσει τη Χριστιανική κοινότητα της Ανατολής, να την προετοιμάσει για μία μακροχρόνια ή και μόνιμη παρουσία του Ισλάμ στον Χριστιανικό χώρο, και να την βοηθήσει στη επιβίωση και συμβίωσή της με αυτό. Αν και στην αρχή μιας απροσδιόριστης έκβασης των γεγονότων, ουδέποτε ο Δαμασκηνός έκανε λόγο περί προσωρινότητας ή επικείμενης εξαφάνισης του Ισλάμ « ἐν τῷ προσήκοντι καὶ ὠρισμένῳ καιρῷ » όπως οι Βυζαντινοί του δεκάτου πέμπτου αιώνα. Διαβλέποντας ότι στα επόμενα χρόνια, ή αιώνες, οι Χριστιανοί περισσότερο από συγγράμματα θα είχαν ανάγκη από έντονη αυτοσυνηδησία και υπαρξιακή θεολογία, καταγίνεται με το βίωμα και την έκφραση της ορθόδοξης πίστεως, όπως την έγχρωμη θεολογία των εικόνων την οποίαν πρώτος υπερασπίστηκε, την ασματική θεολογία των ύμνων την οποίαν ο ίδιος καλλιέργησε, την πνευματική θεολογία της προσευχής και της λατρείας την οποίαν εμπλούτισε με καταβάσεις, ύμνους και νέες ακολουθίες (όπως η *Λιτή* και η νεκρώσιμη ακολουθία), και τη διαλεκτική των επιχειρημάτων και της ευστροφίας του λόγου όπως δείχνει η πρωτότυπη *Διάλεξις Σαρρακηνού και Χριστιανού!* Σ' αυτούς τους χώρους διέπρεψε ο Δαμασκηνός και η περί αυτόν αναγεννητική « σχολή » της εποχής του! Παρά τη συνεχιζόμενη πολύπλευρη περί τον Δαμασκηνό σπουδή, όπως αποδεικνύεται από την έντονη περί αυτόν παγκόσμια βιβλιογραφία, φαίνεται ότι αυτή συνεχίζεται να γίνεται (με ελάχιστες ίσως εξαιρέσεις, όπως του Andrew Louth) σ' ένα κενό θεώρησής των ιστορικών δεδομένων της ζωής και της προσωπικότητάς του, σε σχέση ή εξαιτίας του γεγονότος του Ισλάμ!

Η όλη συγγραφική δραστηριότητα του Δαμασκηνού και η επεξεργασία των εμπειριών, της γνώσης, των προβληματισμών και των οραμάτων του έλαβε χώρα στο μοναστήρι του αγίου Σάββα στην έρημο της Ιουδαίας. Από εκεί μεταφυτεύτηκε και χαραχτηκε στη μνήμη σύγχρονων και μετέπειτα μαθητών του. Ένας από αυτούς ήταν ο Θεόδωρος Abū Qurra (ca. 740/50–ca. 820), μετέπειτα επίσκοπος Χαράν της Μεσοποταμίας και, από το 813/4 (κατά τον Μιχαήλ τον Σύρο), σύμβουλος του Πατριάρχη Ιεροσολύμων. Η Χαράν αναδείχθηκε κοσμοπολίτικη, πλουραλιστική και ανεκτική επαρχία χάρη στον χαρακτήρα και την τόλμη του ίδιου του επισκόπου της. Δεν είναι παράδοξο ότι ένας διάλογός του μεταξύ Χριστιανού και Μουσουλμάνου, παραπλήσιος με εκείνον του Δαμασκηνού (*Opusculum* xviii, pg 97:1544 και pg 96:1596–97) χαρακτηρίζεται από τον Abū Qurra ως « *διά φωνής* Ιωάννου του Δαμασκηνού » – ένας τεχνικός όρος (« *διά φωνής* ») ο οποίος από τον

έκτο μέχρι τον όγδοο αιώνα αποτελούσε για τους κύκλους των διανοουμένων της Αθήνας, της Αλεξάνδρειας και της Γάζας τίτλο αναγνωρισμένου δασκάλου. Έτσι το όνομα του Δαμασκηνού παίρνει τη θέση της αυθεντίας σε θέματα γνώσης και αντιρρητικής κατά του Ισλάμ. Ο Abū Qurra συνέχισε τη διαλεκτική παράδοση του Δαμασκηνού. Άφησε πίσω του μία σειρά από « εργείδια » (*opuscula*), τριάντα στα Συριακά, δώδεκα στα Αραβικά και σαράντα τρία στα Ελληνικά κατά εικονοκλαστών, Μανιχαίων, Ιακωβιτών, Ιουδαίων, και Μουσουλμάνων (PG 97: 1469–609). Δώδεκα από αυτά (*opuscula* VIII, IX, XIX, XX, XXI, XXIV (;), XXV, XXXII, XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII και XXXVIII) έχουν ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον για τις σχέσεις Χριστιανισμού και Ισλάμ. Στόχος του επισκόπου ήταν να οδηγήσει τον αντίπαλό του να δεχθεί ο ίδιος την εγκυρότητα των θέσεων του συνομιλητή του! Η διαλεκτική του Abū Qurra επηρέασε άμεσα τους Μουσουλμάνους « ορθολογιστές » θεολόγους της εποχής του (*Mu'tazila*), οι οποίοι ήσαν οι κύριοι αντίπαλοι των παραδοσιακών Μουσουλμάνων θεολόγων στο θέμα της έννοιας του Κορανίου ως « λόγου Θεού » (*kalima' l illāhi*), και της σχέσης του με την άκτιστη ουσία του Θεού. Στη διαμάχη αυτή οι *Mu'tazila* άντλησαν επιχειρήματα και τεχνική από τις Χριστολογικές έριδες και την περί Χριστού ως ομοουσίου Λόγου του Θεού διδασκαλία του Χριστιανισμού, από τα συγγράμματα του Δαμασκηνού και του Abū Qurra. Από την ενδο-Μουσουλμανική αυτή διαμάχη προήλθαν οι όροι *'ilm al-kalām* (επί λέξει « γνώση », ή επιστήμη, « του λόγου ») για τη φιλοσοφική θεολογία του Ισλάμ, και *mutakallimūn* (επί λέξει « οι περί τον λόγον ασχολούμενοι ») για τους σχολαστικούς-συστηματικούς θεολόγους του. Όπως και ο Δαμασκηνός, ο Abū Qurra αποτελεί παράδειγμα σεμνού και συγκροτημένου απολογητού. Γνώστης και αυτός του Κορανίου, ενδιαφέρεται για διάλογο επί της ουσίας. Τα θέματα τα οποία εγείρει και στα οποία οδηγεί τον συνομιλητή του να επιβεβαιώσει ο ίδιος είναι ότι ο άνθρωπος ως δημιουργημα Θεού έχει ελευθερία και αυτοδυναμία (αυτεξούσιο) δράσης, ότι είναι αδύνατο για το Θεό να μην έχει Υιόν, και ότι ο Θεός δεν μπορεί παρά να είναι *Τριάδα!* Οι διάλογοι μεταξύ Χριστιανού και Μουσουλμάνου, τόσο του Δαμασκηνού όσο και του Abū Qurra, μπορεί να είναι υποθετικοί, γραμμένοι υπό τύπον εγχειριδίων, αλλ' ίσως και να αποτελούν πραγματικούς διαλόγους τους οποίους είχαν συνάψει οι ίδιοι με Μουσουλμάνους της εποχής τους.

Ένα εντελώς διαφορετικό φαινόμενο προβάλλει ο σύγχρονος του Abū Qurra, Θεοφάνης ο Ομολογητής (ca. 760–818), ο έπειτα από σύντομο έγγαμο βίο μοναχός (από το 780, ή 781), υπέρμετρος ζηλωτής, συγγραφέας της γνωστής *Χρονογραφίας* [έκδ. C. De Boor (Lipsiae, 1883)], μιας σημαντικής πηγής για την περίοδο της εικονομαχίας και του πρώιμου Ισλάμ. Χρησιμοποιώντας ως βοηθήματα Συριακές πηγές, χωρίς δική του γνώση του Ισλάμ και μακριά από τα γεγονότα, η *Χρονογραφία* αποτελεί μία από τις παλαιότερες Βυζαντινές εξιστορήσεις των Αραβικών κατακτήσεων, αλλά και μία από τις πιο καυστικές επιθέσεις κατά του Ισλάμ και του Μωάμεθ. Ακριβέστερη *Χρονογραφία* έγραψε στα Αραβικά (Λατινική μετάφραση PG III:907–1156) ο κοντύτερα στα πράγματα και στη νοοτροπία Ευτύχιος II (γνωστός

με το Αραβικό του όνομα Sa'īd b. al-Batrīq, Μελχίτης Πατριάρχης Αλεξανδρείας (933–40/1). Βλέποντας την ιστορία ως μέσον αποκάλυψης του Θεού, ο Θεοφάνης ερμηνεύει τις Αραβικές επιδρομές ως απόδειξη της οργής του Θεού για την αναφύεσα αίρεση του μονοθελητισμού, για τη χλιαρή πίστη των Χριστιανών, και για τις περί την διαδοχή του θρόνου μηχανορραφίες εντός της Βυζαντινής αυλής. Είναι όμως και ο πρώτος ίσως Βυζαντινός ο οποίος επικεντρώνει την προσοχή του στον Μωάμεθ, τον « αρχηγό τών Σαρακηνών και ψευδοπροφήτη », δίνοντας τις πλέον αλλοπρόσאלλες « πληροφορίες » περί αυτού. 'Ο,τι γράφει αποτελεί συμπίλημα λαϊκών δοξασιών οι οποίες βρίθουν ανακριβείας: ότι δέκα Εβραίοι ανακήρυξαν αρχικά τον Μωάμεθ ως προφήτη μέχρις ότου τον είδαν να τρώει κρέας καμήλας και τον απέρριψαν· ότι εξαπάτησε τη Khadijah και την έκανε γυναίκα του με δόλο· ότι διακινούσε τις επιχειρήσεις της στην ... Αίγυπτο· ότι « έθηράτο παρ' αυτών [τών 'Ιουδαίων και Χριστιανών] τινα γραφικά, και έσχε τὸ πάθος τῆς έπιληψίας »· ότι η πλούσια και επιφανής σύζυγός του εμφάνιζε « άλλαις γυναιξιν όμοφύλοις αὐτῆς προφήτην αὐτὸν εἶναι » για να διασκεδάσει τα φυσικά και διανοητικά του μειονεκτήματα· ότι κατέκτησε την πόλη Yathrib, την μετέπειτα Μεδίνα, δια της βίας· ότι διαβεβαίωσε τους οπαδούς του ότι όποιος σκοτώσει ή σκοτωθεί σε πόλεμο θα μπει στον παράδεισο· ότι διδάξε ότι ο παράδεισος είναι τόπος πάσης φύσεως σαρκικών απολαύσεων· ότι « έδίδαξεν τούς έαυτοῦ ύπηκόους [διάφορα] άσωτίας και μωρίας μεστά »· ότι ήταν ήδη νεκρός όταν διόρισε τέσσερεις αρχηγούς (*emirs*) για να επιτεθούν κατά των Αραβικής καταγωγής Χριστιανών· και ότι ήταν οι καταπιεσμένοι από τους Βυζαντινούς 'Αραβες Χριστιανοί αυτοί οι οποίοι οδήγησαν τους Μουσουλμάνους 'Αραβες στη Γάζα. Αν και τον γνώριζε, είναι αμφίβολο αν ο Θεοφάνης είχε διαβάσει τον Δαμασκηνό. Βρισκόταν πάντως πολύ μακριά γεωγραφικά, και κυρίως διανοητικά και ψυχολογικά, για να ήταν σε θέση να τον καταλάβει. Κάνοντας διάκριση μεταξύ αντιρρητικής και πολεμικής, ο Θεοφάνης θα πρέπει να θεωρηθεί ως ο πρώτος που άσκησε πολεμική κατά του Ισλάμ. Η ιστορία επηρεάστηκε λιγότερο από τη γνώση και τη νηφαλιότητα του Δαμασκηνού, και περισσότερο από τις ανακριβείες και την εμπάθεια του Θεοφάνη – στοιχεία τα οποία εξελίχθηκαν σε στερεότυπα κατά του Μωάμεθ και του Ισλάμ εκ μέρους της Βυζαντινής κοινωνίας και της εν γένει Χριστιανικής κοινότητας.

Η Βυζαντινή γραφίδα πάντως δεν περιορίστηκε, ούτε εξαντλήθηκε, σε απολογητική ή πολεμική με στόχο την απαξίωση της ανθρώπινης προσωπικότητας εξαιτίας του Ισλάμ. Κατέγραψε και πνευματικά κείμενα προς επιβεβαίωση της μυστικής εμπειρίας του Θεού, πέρα από τα τείχη της κουλτούρας, του γλωσσικού ιδιώματος ή της θρησκευτικής ταυτότητας! Ο Κωνσταντίνος Ακροπολίτης (+ ca. 1324), γιος του δημόσιου σύμβουλου Γεωργίου Ακροπολίτη (1217–82), « λογοθέτης τοῦ γενικοῦ », « μέγας λογοθέτης » και « νέος Μεταφράστης », στο Λόγο του « εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Βάρβαρον » (ή πιο σωστά « εις κάποιον βάρβαρο άγιο ») [έκδ., Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμεύς, *Ανάλεκτα*, τ. 1, 405–20] αναφέρεται σ' έναν ανώνυμο, αινιγματικό Μουσουλμάνο στρατιώτη του ενάτου αιώνα από τη Β. Αφρική,

« βάρβαρον τὸ γένος, βάρβαρον τὸν τρόπον, βάρβαρον τὴν ἐπήνειαν, βάρβαρον τέως καὶ ἀλλόφυλον », « ἐκ τῆς Ἄγαρ, τὸ δυσσεβέστατον ἔθνος καὶ ἀπηνέστατον ». Αυτὸς ὁ « βάρβαρος » Σαρακηνός, ἐπειτα ἀπὸ μίᾳ συγκλονιστικῆς οπτασίᾳ τὴν ὁποίαν ἐζήσε κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς θείας λειτουργίας τὴν ὁποίαν παρακολούθουσε κρυφὰ σ' ἓνα ἐξωκλήσι τοῦ ἀγίου Γεωργίου στὴ δασώδη Νύσα τῆς Αἰτωλοακαρνανίας (ἐμπειρία τὴν ὁποία δὲν εἶχε δοκιμάσει ποτὲ οὔτε καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ λειτουργός-ιερέας), κατηχεῖται, ἐξομολογεῖται, βαπτίζεται καὶ τελικὰ γίνεται μάρτυρας καὶ μυροβλήτης ἅγιος « Βάρβαρος » τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δηλωτικὸ ὄχι τοῦ ὀνοματὸς τοῦ το ὁποῖον παραμένει ἀγνωστο ἀλλὰ τῆς προέλευσός του. Τιμάται στὶς 15 Μαΐου! Ἡ περίπτωσις τοῦ ἀγίου Βαρβάρου δὲν εἶναι μοναδική. Πέντε αἰῶνες πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀκροπολίτη ὁ Γρηγόριος Δεκαπολίτης (+842) συνέγραψε ἀγιολογικὴ διήγησις [ἐκδ. PG 100:1201–12] γιὰ ἓνα Μουσουλμάνο πρίγκιπα τοῦ ἐνάτου αἰῶνα, ὁ ὁποῖος καὶ αὐτὸς ὕστερα ἀπὸ οπτασίᾳ τοῦ μελισμοῦ ἐνὸς νεαροῦ παιδιοῦ στὰ χέρια τοῦ ἱερουργούντος ἱερέα κατὰ τὴ στιγμὴ τοῦ καθαγιασμοῦ τῶν τιμῶν δώρων (ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ πάλι τοῦ ἱερουργούντος ἱερέα!), συγκλονισμένος ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονός, καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ κατήχησις, ἀποδέχεται τὸν Χριστιανισμό, βαπτίζεται, μονάζει ὑπὸ τὸ ὄνομα Παχώμιος καὶ πεθαίνει ὡς ὀμολογητής! Πέραν τῆς ἱστορικότητος, ἢ μὴ, αὐτῶν τῶν ἀφηγήσεων τέτοια κείμενα δὲν ἔχουν βρεῖ τὴν ἀνάλογη θέση στὴν ἱστορία τῶν Βυζαντινο-Ἰσλαμικῶν ἢ δια-θρησκευτικῶν σχέσεων, τουλάχιστον ὡς φαινόμενα γραμματείας.

Στὸν ἀντίποδα τέτοιων κειμένων βρίσκεται ἡ πολεμικὴ τοῦ Βαρθολομαίου Ἐδέσσης, ἀκατανόητη γιὰ τὴ βιαιότητά της γιὰ ἓνα μάλιστα μοναχό. Θεωροῦμε ὅτι ἀνήκει στὸν ἐνάτο αἰῶνα, ἐνῶ κατ' ἄλλους στὸν ἐνδέκατο, ἢ δέκατο τρίτο αἰῶνα, ἢ καὶ ἀργότερα. Με τὸ ὄνομά του ἔχουν συνδεθεῖ δύο κείμενα, *Ἐλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ* [ἐκδ. με Γερμανικὴ μετάφρασις, Klaus-Peter Todt, *Bartholomaios von Edessa. Confutatio Agareni. Kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe* (Würzburg, 1988)] καὶ ἓνα συντομότερο, τὸ *Κατὰ Μωάμεδ* [PG 104:1448–57] τὸ ὁποῖο μπορεῖ νὰ μὴ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ ἴδιο χέρι. Κατὰ ἀντίστροφο τρόπο, τὸ *Κατὰ Μωάμεδ* ἀποτελεῖ ἀντιρρητικὴ κατὰ τοῦ συνόλου τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, ἐνῶ ὁ *Ἐλεγχος* ἔχει στόχο ἀποκλειστικὰ τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Μωάμεθ! Παρ' ὅτι ὁ συγγραφέας αὐτοσυστήνεται ὡς « μοναχὸς Βαρθολομαῖος ὁ Ἐδεσηνὸς ὁ ἀμαθέστατος τῶν Χριστιανῶν, καὶ ἔσχατος πάντων », δὲν χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ ἀνάλογο φρόνημα. Ἐπαίρεται στὸ Μουσουλμάνο, πραγματικὸ ἢ ὑποθετικὸ, συνομιλητὴ τοῦ ὅτι « γινώσκει, καὶ καλῶς ἐπίσταται » τὰ πάντα περὶ τῆς θρησκείας του, ὅτι « πάντα τὰ ὑμέτερα βιβλία ἀνέγνω, καὶ ἔγνω », καὶ ὅτι « τὰ βιβλία ὑμῶν ὅλα διήλθον ». Ἐπιπλέον τὸν κατηγορεῖ ἀπαξιωτικὰ ὅτι ἔχει πλήρη ἀγνοία περὶ τοῦ Μωάμεθ καὶ τὸν καλεῖ νὰ μάθει ἀπὸ αὐτόν, προβάλλοντας τὸ ἐκπληκτικὸ ἐπιχείρημα ὅτι οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ξέρουν τόσα γιὰ τὸν Μωάμεθ ὅσα οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ... « διότι ἡμεῖς [οἱ Χριστιανοί] πρὸ τοῦ Μωάμεθ ἔσμεν, καὶ ἀκριβῶς τὰ κατ' αὐτοῦ ἅπαντα [γινώσκομεν] »! Στὴ συνέχεια τοῦ *Ἐλέγχου* ἐπιχειρεῖ μίᾳ ἐκθεσῇ « γεγονότων » καὶ συγκρίσεων μεταξύ Χριστοῦ καὶ Μωάμεθ γιὰ νὰ δείξει τὴν ὑπεροχὴ τοῦ πρώτου ἐπὶ τοῦ δευτέρου. Φαίνεται ὅτι τέτοιου εἶδους συγκρίσεις ἐντυπωσίασαν

τους Μουσουλμάνους οι οποίοι έκτοτε εκμεταλλεύτηκαν τη μέθοδο για να « αποδείξουν » ότι ο Μωάμεθ επιτέλεσε περισσότερα και σπουδαιότερα θαύματα και, επομένως, ήταν ανώτερος προφήτης από τον Χριστό! Στην προσπάθειά του να δείξει πόσο « ποταπή είναι η πίστις » των Μουσουλμάνων, και χωρίς γνώση ίσως των Αραβικών, διαστρεβλώνει μία καιρία λέξη και έννοια του Κορανίου περί του Θεού: στη σούρα 112 (*al-tawhīd* = η Ενότητα), η οποία χαρακτηρίζεται από τους Μουσουλμάνους ως η « αγνότητα » (*al-iqlās*) και η πεμπτουσία του Κορανίου, απαντά η μεταφορική λέξη *sāmad* (« συμπαγής ») η οποία θέλει να τονίσει και να εξηγήσει τον τρόπο ενότητας του Είναι του Θεού· ότι, δηλαδή, ο Θεός είναι απόλυτα απλός, συμπαγής, χωρίς μετόχους, μέρη, ή « εξαρτήματα »! Ο Βαρθολομαίος σταματάει στη λέξη *sāmad*, την επεκτείνει και περιγράφει τον Θεό ως « όλόσφυρον, και όλόβολον, οίος κρατείται, και σχήμα ἔχει »· δηλαδή ως ένα σφαιρικό αντικείμενο με μάζα και σχήμα το οποίον μπορεί κανείς να καίξει στο χέρι του! Πιο προσεκτικός στο σημείο αυτό είχε αποδειχθεί νωρίτερα ο Abū Qurra ο οποίος, γνωρίζοντας Αραβικά, έχοντας αίσθηση της έννοιας του *sāmad* και χωρίς διάθεση γελοιοποίησής της, την είχε μεταφράσει με ένα αντίστοιχο μεταφορικό επίθετο, « σφυρόπηκτος » [*Opusculum*, xx, pg 97: 1545C]. Η διαστρέβλωση της έννοιας του « ολόσφυρος » από τον Βαρθολομαίο κυριάρχησε στη μνήμη των Βυζαντινών· τόσο μάλιστα που, όπως θα δούμε, τον ενδέκατο αιώνα ο Ευθύμιος Ζιγαβηνός ενώ χρησιμοποιεί ως πηγή του τον Δαμασκηνό, επαναλαμβάνει και επιτείνει την περί « ολοσφύρου » Θεού διαστρέβλωση του Βαρθολομαίου. Η ίδια αυτή στρέβλωση βρήκε, όπως θα δούμε, θέση και στη λειτουργική « Τάξιν γινομένην επί τοῖς ἀπό Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσιν πρὸς τὴν καθαρὰν καὶ ἀληθὴ πίστιν ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν » – κείμενο το οποίον αποδίδεται στον ιστορικό, υπουργό της δυναστείας των Κομνηνών και των Αγγέλων, Νικήτα Χωνιάτη (ca. 1155–ca. 1215/6).

Ο Βαρθολομαίος βλέπει το Ισλάμ ως δυσσεβή θρησκεία. Ανήμπορος να επιχειρηματολογήσει όπως ο Δαμασκηνός ή ο Abū Qurra, γίνεται πολεμικός και βλάσφημος. Στρέφεται εναντίον του Μουσουλμάνου συνομιλητή του με βαρείς χαρακτηρισμούς *ad hominem*. Τον αποκαλεί ασεβή, άθεον, ανόητον, « βραδὺ τῆ καρδίᾳ », πεπλανημένον, βεβορβορωμένον, ελεεινόν, άφρονα, αναιδή, και.... « πλυνόκωλον », γελοιοποιώντας έτσι και τις περί καθαρμών διατάξεις του Ισλάμ πριν από κάθε προσευχή του νυχθημέρου! Επιτίθεται κατά του προσώπου του Μωάμεθ, ο οποίος για τους Μουσουλμάνους είναι προφήτης και πρότυπο συμπεριφοράς, ως λάγνον, παμμίαρον, ληστήν, άδικον, φονέα, άρπαγα, ψεύτην, απατεώνα, ακάθαρτον κ. ά. Αν μπορεί να υπάρξει κάποια εξήγηση για την οργή και βιαιότητα του Βαρθολομαίου αυτή πρέπει να αναζητηθεί στην κατά τον ένατον αιώνα έξαρση των πειρατικών επιδρομών των Αράβων με συχνό στόχο μοναστικές κοινότητες της Παλαιστίνης, της Μικράς Ασίας, της Κρήτης, της Β. Αφρικής και του Αιγαίου. Μαρτυρίες τέτοιων επιδρομών αφθονούν στις αγιολογικές πηγές αναφερόμενες στον Ιωσήφ τον Υμνογράφο (ca. 810/818), Σέργιο Νικητιάτη, Ηλία τον Σπηλαιώτη (ca. 860/870–960), Λουκά τον Νέο, Χριστόφορο και Μακάριο, Σάββα τον Νέο, Θεόδωρο Κυθήρων, Πέτρο τον

Αθωνίτη, Ευθύμιο τον Νέο, Αθανάσιον τον Αθωνίτη, Αθανάσιο Μεθώνης, Ηλία τον Νέο (823–903), τους Σαράντα μάρτυρες του Αμορίου (838), τη Θεοκτίστη της Λέσβου, Θεοδόσιο το μοναχό και πολλούς άλλους.

Δηώσεις και λεηλασίες εκκλησιών και μοναστηριών, όπως του αγίου Σάββα, του αγίου Χαρίτωνος και άλλων, διωγμός και μαρτυρικός θάνατος μοναχών, ερήμωση μονών, ξεριζωμός πληθυσμών και τα συναφή ήσαν συχνό φαινόμενο της εποχής. Ο Βαρθολομαίος έγραφε κάτω από ένα τέτοιο ψυχολογικό βάρος. Εν τούτοις είναι εξαιρετικά ενδιαφέρον το γεγονός ότι πολλοί από τους ως άνω πρωταγωνιστές οσίους και μάρτυρες άφησαν πίσω τους παραδείγματα ισόρροπων περιγραφών, ακόμη και διαλόγου με Μουσουλμάνους. Χαρακτηριστικό δείγμα αποτελεί ο όσιος Ηλίας ο Νέος (823–903) ο οποίος αν και σε νεαρή ηλικία απήχθη από τους Αγαρηνούς και πουλήθηκε δύο φορές ως δούλος, αυτός δεν δίστασε να τους ευεργετήσει και να συνδιαλεχθεί μαζί τους [έκδ. G. Rossi Taibbi, *Vita di Sant' Elia il Giovanne* (Palermo, 1962)].

Τον ίδιον αιώνα με τον Βαρθολομαίο και με παρόμοιο μένος γράφει ο χρονογράφος μοναχός Γεώργιος, αυτοαποκαλούμενος «Άμαρτωλός». Στο Τέταρτο Βιβλίο του *Χρονικού* του [έκδ. Carolus de Boor, *Georgius Monachus, Chronicon*, 2 τόμοι (Leipzig, 1904)] το οποίο καλύπτει το τεράστιο διάστημα από τον Αδάμ μέχρι το 842, ασχολείται με την «μυσράν και παμμίαιρον αίρεσιν» του Ισλάμ. Εκεί, σε ένα πεντάστηλο κεφάλαιο (αριθ. 235), κάνει εκτενή λόγο «Περὶ τοῦ ἀρχηγού τῶν Σαρακηνῶν Μωάμεθ τοῦ καὶ Μουχούμετ». Αρυόμενος κυρίως από τον Θεοφάνη και τον Βαρθολομαίο, επιδίδεται σε μία πρωτοφανή επίθεση κατά του Μωάμεθ. Τον χαρακτηρίζει ως «ψευδοπροφήτην», «ἐπιληπτικόν», «θεομισή καὶ ἄθεον», «δούλον τῆς ἀμαρτίας», «μυθεσάμενον», «σαρκόφρονα καὶ ἐμπαθή», «θεοστυγή καὶ ἐμβρόντητον», «ἀντίθεον καὶ μεμνητότα ὑπὸ τῶν Ἐρινύων ἐνεργούμενον καὶ φθεγγόμενον», «δυσσεβή καὶ παραπαίοντα», «κάκιστον καὶ μοχθηρόν», «τρισάθλιον καὶ τρισκατάρατον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἄσπονδον ἔχθρὸν ἐκ σκαιότερου πλάνου δαίμονος ἐνηχούμενον καὶ ἐναργούμενον», «ἀλητήριον», «θεήλατον», και διάφορα άλλα. Ὅσον αφορά στους Μουσουλμάνους αποκαλεί αυτούς «πλάνη δεδουλωμένους», «ἐσκοτισμένους», «ἄσυνέτους», «δεΐλαιους καὶ βαρυκαρδίους», «χαιρεπίκαους», «κακόφρονες καὶ λυσσώδεις», «ἀνίστους καὶ δυσώνυμους, (ἢ μάλλον εἴπωμεν ἀνώνυμους)», «ἀδιάκριτους καὶ μανιώδεις», «ἄφρονες καὶ βοσκηματώδεις», «ἀνούστατους καὶ ἀπόπληκτους», «χοιρώδεις καὶ τελματώδεις», «ἐναγείς καὶ βέβηλους»! Φαίνεται ὅτι ἀπὸ τον ἑνατον αἰῶνα ἡ κάποια τυχόν διαλεκτική με το Ισλάμ ἀναστέλλεται και στο στόχαστρο πολεμικῆς των Βυζαντινῶν μπαίνει ὄχι τόσο το Ισλάμ ἀλλ' ὁ Μωάμεθ, πρὸς χάριν ἀμεσότερου φανατισμοῦ των λαϊκῶν στρωμάτων.

Τον ίδιον πάντως αἰῶνα και με πιθανό μοχλό τον Φώτιο (ca. 810–μετά το 893) διαφαίνεται και ἕνα ἄλλο ρεύμα. Το ὄνομα του διανοούμενου μετέπειτα Πατριάρχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (858–67, 877–86) συνδέεται με μεγάλα πολιτικά και εκκλησιαστικά γεγονότα. Ανάμεσα σ' αυτά και ἡ προ της Πατριαρχείας του συμμετοχή

του σε μία ή περισσότερες αυτοκρατορικές αποστολές (το 838, 845, ή το 855) στην αυλή των Αββασιδών, στη Βαγδάτη, όπως δηλώνει ο ίδιο στον αδελφό του Ταράσιο στην εισαγωγή της *Βιβλιοθήκης* του. Τέτοιες αποστολές αποσκοπούσαν στην απελευθέρωση αιχμαλώτων. Τις θετικές εντυπώσεις τις οποίες άφησε ο Φώτιος κατά την πρεσβεία του και τη φιλόφρονα συμπεριφορά του μαρτυρεί ο Πατριάρχης Νικόλαος Μυστικός (901–07, 912–25). Κατά μία μάλιστα εξαιρετικά ενδιαφέρονσα (μολοντί αμφιλεγόμενη) υπόθεση, ο Φώτιος ίσως να εκμεταλλεύτηκε την παρουσία του στην πρωτεύουσα των Αββασιδών για να καταγράψει από τις βιβλιοθήκες της ανθούσης τότε Βαγδάτης σημαντικό υλικό το οποίο μετέφερε στη *Μυριόβιβλο*, ή *Βιβλιοθήκη* [έκδ. René Henry, *Photius Bibliothèque*, τ. I, (Paris, 1959)], ένα μνημειώδες βιβλιογραφικό έργο του. Αν και δεν φαίνεται να έχει γράψει ο ίδιος τίποτε για το Ισλάμ, η πρεσβεία και η προσωπικότητά του προσδίδουν ιδιαίτερη σημασία στις Βυζαντινο-Ισλαμικές σχέσεις τον ένατο αιώνα.

‘Όχι τόσο όσο ο Γεώργιος « Αμαρτωλός » αλλ’ επίσης επιθετικός (ίσως όμως ψευδεπιγράφως) εμφανίζεται και ο λόγιος Αρχιεπίσκοπος Καισαρείας Αρέθας (ca. 850–932, του οποίου το όνομα φαίνεται να έχει Αραβική προέλευση, Arith), μαθητής του Φωτίου, πρώτος τη τάξει των μητροπολιτών της συνόδου της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, αυστηρός επικριτής του τετάρτου γάμου του αυτοκράτορα Λέοντος Στ’ του Σοφού (886–912), μέλος μιας ελίτ διανοουμένων της αναγέννησης των Ελληνικών γραμμάτων και των κλασικών σπουδών στο Βυζάντιο τον ένατο και δέκατο αιώνα. Αν και αναγνωρίζει τα διανοητικά προτερήματά του, ο Romily J.H. Jenkins χαρακτηρίζει τον Αρέθα με όχι και τόσο κολακευτικά επίθετα, όπως στενοκέφαλο, κακόθυμο και φιλόδοξο. Τον κατηγορεί επίσης για ελαφρότητες και σκανδαλώδεις προδοσίες [*Byzantium The Imperial Centuries AD 610–1071* (Toronto, 1987)] λόγω των επεμβάσεών του στο θέμα της τετραγαμίας του Λέοντος Στ’ του Σοφού! Στον Αρέθα αποδίδεται μία Επιστολή « Πρὸς τὸν ἐν Δαμασκῶ ἀμηνρὰν προτροπή Ῥωμαίου [ἢ Ῥωμανοῦ:] βασιλέως » [έκδ. J. Compnass, *Denkmäler der griechischen Volkssprache* (Bonn, 1913)]. Στο περιθώριο του χειρογράφου διαβάζουμε ότι η επιστολή « *ιδιωτικῶς ἐξεδόθη τῇ φράσει εἰς σύνεσιν τῶν Σαρακηνῶν* ». Η σημείωση εξηγεί εν μέρει το δηκτικό προοίμιο της επιστολής:

πῶς δὲ καθαρὰν καὶ ἀμώμητον τὴν τῶν Σαρακηνῶν καλεῖν ἡνέσχου πίστιν, ἥτις ἀπὸ τοῦ πλανήσαντος ὑμᾶς Μωάμετ τῆς ἐντολῆς ὡς τὸ κουρὰν καὶ τὸ φουρκὰν [ονομασίες του Κορανίου Qur’an = « ἀπαγγελία », καὶ *furqān* « αὐτὸ το ὁποῖο διαχωρίζει » (το καλὸ ἀπὸ το κακὸ)] διδάσκει ὑμᾶς; οὐ πλήρης ἀκαθαρσίας ἐστὶ, ταῖς πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας μάλιστα πορνείαις καὶ ἄλλοις πολλοῖς αἰσχροῖς καὶ ἀτόποις ἔργοις ὑποβαλλούσης ὑμᾶς;

Κατόπιν αυτού του προοιμίου είναι δύσκολο να φανταστεί κανείς ότι μία τέτοια επιστολή θα μπορούσε να ήταν όντως βασιλική ή, κρίνοντας από το περιεχόμενό της, του

Αρέθα. Ίσως αυτό το προοίμιο να αποτελεί μεταγενέστερη προσθήκη, ή ολόκληρη η επιστολή να είναι ψευδεπίγραφη με πλαστογραφημένο το όνομα του επιφανούς Βυζαντινού διανοουμένου και εκκλησιαστικού για λόγους εντυπωσιασμού.

Η επιστολή θέτει εξαρχής τρία κριτήρια επί τη βάσει των οποίων ο Χριστιανισμός έχει, κατά τον συγγραφέα, εξασφαλίσει την αυθεντικότητά του ως θρησκεία: ότι την έλευση του Χριστού προανήγγειλαν προφήτες· ότι ο Ιησούς γεννήθηκε κατά υπερφυσικό τρόπο και επιτέλεσε θαύματα· και ότι εξαπλώθηκε μέσω δώδεκα απλών και πτωχών ανθρώπων. Το Ισλάμ όμως, κατά τον επιστολογράφο, δεν έχει ικανοποιήσει αντίστοιχα κριτήρια! Υπεραπλουστεύσεις αυτού του είδους δημιουργούσαν προϋποθέσεις « αποδεικτικών » στοιχείων τα οποία στην ουσία μετέλλαζαν τη Χριστιανική (αλλά και την Ισλαμική) πίστη από αποκάλυψη και « Όδο » [βλ. Πράξεις 9:2, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 22] σε θρησκευμα με μετρήσιμα στοιχεία σύγκρισης. Κάτι τέτοιο αποτέλεσε πρόκληση και οδήγησε την άλλη πλευρά να αναπαράγει, ή και να εφεύρει τέτοια στοιχεία. Όντως, υπό την πίεση μιας τέτοιας πρόκλησης, η Μουσουλμανική κοινότητα είχε ήδη πριν από τον Αρέθα οδηγηθεί να εφεύρει δικές της « αδιάσειστες αποδείξεις » αυθεντίας, και μάλιστα υπεροχής του Ισλάμ έναντι του Χριστιανισμού· ότι, δηλαδή, την έλευση του Μωάμεθ προανήγγειλαν οι προ αυτού προφήτες, τελευταίος των οποίων ήταν ο ίδιος ο Χριστός ο οποίος μίλησε περί « Παρακλήτου » (στα Αραβικά, Ahmad = Muhammad!) ο οποίος θα έλθει και θα « μαρτυρήσει περι αυτού » (Ιωάν. 15:26, 16:7)· ότι και ο Μωάμεθ επιτέλεσε θαύματα, και μάλιστα περισσότερα από του Ιησού· και ότι το Ισλάμ εξαπλώθηκε με εκπληκτική ταχύτητα και επιτυχία από ανθρώπους της ερήμου – απόδειξη ότι αυτό είναι η αληθινή θρησκεία, και ότι ο Θεός είναι με το μέρος των Μουσουλμάνων!

Σημαντική φυσιογνωμία στη Βυζαντινή αντι-Ισλαμική γραμματεία αποτελεί ο Νικήτας, ο επονομαζόμενος « Βυζάντιος » και, όχι αδικαιολόγητα, « Φιλόσοφος » (842–912). Ανήκει και αυτός στον κύκλο των διανοουμένων του Φωτίου και του Αρέθα. Διακρίθηκε ως ο επίσημος απολογητής κατά των Αρμενίων στο θέμα των δύο φύσεων του Χριστού, κατά των Λατίνων στο θέμα της εκπόρευσης του αγίου Πνεύματος, και κατά των Μουσουλμάνων σε θέματα όπως περί Κορανίου, ενότητας του Θεού και θεότητας του Χριστού. Στην *Ανατροπή τής παρά τού Άραβος Μωάμεθ πλαστογραφηθείσης βίβλου* [PG 105: 669–805], το πιο εμπεριστατωμένο τμήμα των απολογητικών του, επιχείρησε ανασκευή ορισμένων κατ' επιλογήν « κεφαλαίων » του Κορανίου και θεμάτων της Ισλαμικής θεολογίας. Έγραψε επίσης απαντήσεις [PG 105: 808–21, 821–41] σε δύο επιστολές τις οποίες είχε λάβει ο αυτοκράτορας Μιχαήλ ΙΙΙ (842–67), γιος του Θεόφιλου, από κάποιον σημαντικό αλλ' ακόμη απροσδιόριστο Μουσουλμάνο θεολόγο, ο οποίος φαίνεται να είχε στείλει επιστολή στον αυτοκράτορα εξ ονόματος ανώτατου Μουσουλμάνου ηγέτη, πιθανόν και του ίδιου του χαλίφη των Αββασιδών! Ανταλλαγή επιστολών μεταξύ Βυζαντινών αυτοκρατόρων και χαλιφών επί δογματικών θεμάτων (με σαφείς πάντα πολιτικές νύξεις, καθώς



θρησκεία και κράτος ήταν αλληλένδετα στοιχεία και στις δύο παραδόσεις) αποτελεί χαρακτηριστικό του ένατου και δέκατου αιώνα. Οι δύο απαντητικές επιστολές του Νικήτα συνιστούν μία αναλυτική-φιλοσοφική ανατροπή των Μουσουλμανικών δοξασιών περί μοναρχίας του Θεού, οι οποίες προσβάλλουν το Τριαδικό δόγμα της Χριστιανικής θρησκείας και την ομοουσιότητα και θεότητα του Χριστού. Μία τέτοια προσέγγιση θεμάτων πίστης συνέπιπτε με την τάση τόσο της Χριστιανικής όσο και της Μουσουλμανικής κοινότητας της εποχής, την οποίαν εξέφραζαν ο κύκλος του Φωτίου αφενός και οι Μουσουλμάνοι *falasifa* (φιλόσοφοι) αφετέρου. Ο Νικήτας αποκαλεί τον συνομιλητή του « πολυπειρώτατον φίλον », χωρίς όμως να διστάζει να χαρακτηρίσει το συλλογισμό του « ήλίθιον », το επιχείρημά του « σόφισμα », και τον τρόπο με τον οποίον ερμηνεύει το Χριστιανικό δόγμα αλλόκοτο, με σκοπό τη στρέβλωση (« αλλοκώτως επί τῆ διαβολῆ »)! Εύστοχα ο Νικήτας συνδέει τη θεολογία με την απορρέουσα από αυτήν ανθρωπολογία του Ισλάμ. Κατ' αυτόν ο Ισλαμικός δυναμικός μοναρχιανισμός οδηγεί σε αγνωσία του Θεού, διότι το « ὕψος [του Θεού] ἀόριστόν ἐστιν· ὅς ἔπλασε τὸ πλάσμα αὐτοῦ χωρίς τῆς ὁμοιότητος τῆς πρὸς αὐτόν ». Συνεπώς, « ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὐ πέπλασται κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ καὶ ὁμοίωσιν »! Με τη σύνδεση θεολογίας και ανθρωπολογίας ο Νικήτας εξαίρει τη διδασκαλία της Ανατολικής Εκκλησίας περί ανθρώπου και σωτηρίας, χωρίς να διακυβεύει την υπερβατικότητα του Θεού η οποία για το Ισλάμ παραμένει αδιαφιλονίκητη! Εδώ έχουμε διάλογο ουσίας, όχι πυροτεχνήματα λεκτικών ὕβρεων. Υπάρχουν, βεβαίως, και στο Νικήτα αντιρρητικές ανακολουθίες προερχόμενες από παρεξηγήσεις και ανακριβείς πληροφορίες περί του Ισλάμ. Πάνω απ' όλα όμως διακρίνει κανείς διάθεση διαλόγου, σοβαρότητα ὕφους, εγκυρότητα επιχειρημάτων, σεβασμό προς το πρόσωπο και τις δοξασίες του άλλου, και προσπάθεια αλληλοπεριχώρησης των θεμάτων με τα οποία ο συγγραφέας καταπιάνεται. Ο τρόπος με τον οποίον συνδιαλέγεται κανείς, έχει να κάνει με την αξία την οποίαν αποδίδει στο θέμα επί του οποίου συνδιαλέγεται. Δεν είναι, δηλαδή, δυνατόν να αναθεματίζει τον « Θεό του Μωάμεθ » χωρίς αυτό να αναφέρεται και στο πώς χειρίζεται το μυστήριο του Θεού και από πόσο δέος διακατέχεται από αυτό· ούτε επίσης να εξουθενώνει την ανθρώπινη υπόσταση χωρίς έτσι να αμφισβητεί και να σπιλώνει την έννοια της « εικόνας καὶ ὁμοίωσης » του Θεού στον άνθρωπο!

Ο δέκατος αιώνας αποτελεί ορόσημο στις Βυζαντινο-Αραβικές σχέσεις. Η σύγκρουση μεταξύ « τῆς φυλῆς τῶν Ἰσραηλιτῶν » και των « Ρωμαίων », όπως θα πει δύο περίπου αιώνες αργότερα ο Ζωναράς, έφτανε σε καίριο σημείο. Η Αραβική κυριαρχία δεν ήταν πλέον υπό αμφισβήτηση. Είχε επεκταθεί και ωριμάσει πολιτικά και πολιτιστικά τόσο ώστε οι Βυζαντινοί να βλέπουν τους Άραβες περισσότερο ως εταίρους παρά ως αντιπάλους στο διεθνές θέατρο. Όμως, και παρά τις σημαντικές επιτυχίες της στη Μέση Ανατολή και στη Βόρεια Αφρική, η Αραβική πλευρά δεν ήταν κυρίαρχη παντού, π.χ. στη Νότιο Ιταλία και στο Αιγαίο. Το φαινόμενο σημαντικών στρατιωτικών αποστασιών από το Βυζαντινό στο Αραβο-ισλαμικό στρατόπεδο,

όπως αυτών του Δαμιανού από την Ταρσό και του Λέοντα από την Τρίπολη, είναι εξίσου αποκαλυπτικό της αμφίροπης ισχύος των υπερδυνάμεων της εποχής. Η κάθε πλευρά αναγνώριζε διστακτικά τη δύναμη της άλλης, όχι όμως και την υπεροχή της. Τα στρατιωτικά γεγονότα της εποχής, οι αλληπάλληλες νίκες, ήττες η εναλλαγές υπεροχής της μιας ή της άλλης πλευράς (κατάληψη της Θεσσαλονίκης τον Μάρτιο του 903 ή τον Ιούλιο του 904, η ανακατάληψη της Κρήτης το 960–61) είναι πολλές για να αναφερθούν σε μία σύντομη σκιαγραφή. Δημιουργούσαν πάντως ανάλογα συναισθήματα αμοιβαίου θαυμασμού, και απόρριψης [βλ. το γεμάτο προσδοκία για την απελευθέρωση της Σικελίας, της Συρίας και του υπόλοιπου κόσμου ποίημα Θεοδοσίου του διακόνου στην ανακατάληψη της Κρήτης, έκδ., Η. Criscuolo, *Theodosii Diaconi de Creta capta* (Leipzig, 1979), και Ν. Παναγιωτάκη, *Θεοδόσιος ο Διάκονος και τὸ ποίημα αὐτοῦ « Ἄλωσις τῆς Κρήτης »* (Ἡράκλειον, 1960)]. Οι Βυζαντινοί πέτυχαν μεν σημαντικές νίκες στο πεδίο της μάχης, ἀλλ' ἐπιδίωξαν να συνάψουν και συμφωνίες ειρήνης και ν' ανταλλάξουν αιχμαλώτους με τους Ἀραβες. Το ίδιο και οι Ἀραβες. Το φαινόμενο δεν ἔμεινε χωρίς θρησκευτικές διαπιστώσεις και θεολογικές ἐπεξηγήσεις. Οι νίκες ἐρμηνεύονταν ως ἀπόδειξη συμμαχίας του Θεοῦ με τον νικητὴ, ἀλλὰ και αυθεντικότητας της θρησκείας του. Ὅπου ὅμως το ἐπιχείρημα δεν ἀνταποκρινόταν με τα γεγονότα, ἔπρεπε αὐτὸ να προσαρμοστεί ὥστε να δικαιολογεί και τις ἡττες. Ἐτσι, το σκεπτικὸ ἔλεγε ὅτι, ναι μεν κάποιος ἠττήθηκε ἀλλ' αὐτὸ εἶναι διότι ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέτρεψε την ἡττα του ἀπὸ ἀγάπη προς αὐτόν για να τον συνειτίσει!

Ἐκφραστὴς αὐτῆς της θεώρησης ἰσορροπίας δυνάμεων εἶναι ὁ Νικόλαος Μυστικὸς, Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (901–07, 912–25), ἐπικεφαλῆς του συμβουλίου ἀντιβασιλείας του ἀνήλικου Κωνσταντίνου Ζ' Πορφυρογέννητου (913–20). Γράφοντας « *Τῷ περιδόξῳ καὶ λαμπροτάτῳ ἀμφοῖν Κρήτης [;] καὶ ἡγαπημένῳ* » με σκοπὸ να υποστηρίξει τα αιτήματα της διπλωματικῆς ἀποστολῆς στη Βαγδάτη (913) του μετέπειτα ἁγίου Δημητρίου της Κύπρου, ὁ Πατριάρχης γράφει στον χαλίφη τα ἐξῆς ἐκπληκτικά:

... δύο κυριότητες πάσης τῆς ἐν γῆ κυριότητος, ἢ τε τῶν Σαρακηνῶν καὶ ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ὑπερανέχουσι καὶ διαλάμπουσιν, ὥσπερ οἱ δύο μεγάλοι ἐν τῷ στερεώματι φωστήρες. Καὶ δεῖ κατ' αὐτὸ γε τοῦτο μόνον κοινωνικῶς ἔχειν καὶ ἀδελφικῶς, καὶ μὴ δ' ὅτι τοῖς βίοις καὶ τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τῷ σεβάσματι κεχωρίσμεθα, παντάπασιν ἄλλοτρίως διακείσθαι καὶ ἀποστερεῖν ἑαυτοὺς τῆς διὰ τῶν γραμμάτων συνομιλίας παρὰ μέρος ἐντυχίας. Δεῖ μὲν οὖν οὕτω καὶ φρονεῖν ἡμᾶς καὶ ποιεῖν, κἄν μηδεμία τις ἄλλη πραγμάτων χρεία πρὸς τοῦτο προὔτρεπετο.

PG 111:28–36, 28B. Ἐπιστολὴς του Νικόλαου Μυστικῆς, ἐκδ. R.J.H. Jenkins and L.G. Westerink, *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters. Greek Text and English Translation* (Washington D.C. 1973)

Δεν αποκλείεται ο Νικόλαος Μυστικός να ήταν ο επικεφαλής αυτής της αποστολής και κομιστής της αυτοκρατορικής επιστολής την οποίαν είχε γράψει ο ίδιος. Ο ανταγωνισμός για στρατιωτικο-πολιτική υπεροχή δεν είχε μέχρι τότε αναδείξει τον πραγματικό νικητή, είτε από τη μία είτε από την άλλη πλευρά. Έτσι δικαιολογείται το φιλόφρων ύφος της επιστολής. Ο Νικόλαος ονομάζει τον χαλίφη “μεγαλοδοξώτατον άρχηγόν Σαρακηνών” και χαρακτηρίζει την εξουσία του « θεόσδοτον ». Με αφορμή δε τη συμφωνία την οποίαν οι Σαρακηνοί είχαν συνάψει με τους Κυπρίους, την οποίαν όμως αθέτησαν, ο Νικόλαος τονίζει στον χαλίφη ότι οι Σαρακηνοί αποτελούν πλέον μέρος ενός « κοινού δικαίου » το οποίον τώρα τους υποχρεώνει να φέρονται ανάλογα με όσες « πόλεις ή έθνη κέκτηνται ύποφόρους ». Αυτή η έννομη τάξη, σημειώνει ο Νικόλαος, “άντέστραπται παρά Σαρακηνοίς τοίς νόμω πολιτευομένοις”, και μάλιστα “έκ μόνης άπονοίας άνδρός, και τήν τών Χριστιανών άπληρημένου πίστιν, και τό Σαρακηνών σέβας νοθεύοντος”. Εμμέσως πλην σαφώς ο Νικόλαος κατονομάζει εδώ τον στρατηγό αποστάτη Δαμιανό νοθευτή της αξιοπιστίας των Σαρακηνών και ύποπτο εκπρόσωπο του « άμηρά » των πιστών, ηγέτη της Μουσουλμανικής κοινότητας.

Σε μία δεύτερη επιστολή του [PG 111:36C-40B] ο Μυστικός εξυμνεί τη φιλία και όσους κατανοούν ότι “έν τῷ βίῳ πάντων και τιμιώτερον και χαριέστερον τό τής φιλίας τερπνόν ». Ακολουθώντας τη φιλόφρονα παράδοση του Φωτίου, αναγνωρίζει την « εγγένειαν » του χαλίφη, τη διάθεσή του προς τον διάλογο και τη φιλία. Του θυμίζει δε το σεβασμό τον οποίον έτρεφε ο Φώτιος προς τους Σαρακηνούς, ιδιαίτερα προς τον πατέρα του χαλίφη, τόσον « ώς ούδεις ούδέ τών όμοδόξων και όμοφίλων φιλικώς διετέθειντο πρός ύμάς ». Κλείνοντας δε την επιστολή προσφωνεί τον χαλίφη ως « φίλων έμοι άριστε ». Με το Νικόλαο Μυστικό η στάση του Βυζαντίου προς το Ισλάμ εκφράζεται πραγματιστικά στο χώρο της διπλωματίας, με όλα τα χαρακτηριστικά της Βυζαντινής επιδειξιοτήτας και εθιμοτυπίας!

Ο Θεόδωρος Δαφνοπάτης (890/900-μετά το 961), αυτοαποκαλούμενος πρωτοασκηρήτης, πατρίκιος και μάγιστρος, θεωρείται ως ο συγγραφέας των ομιλιών και επιστολών του Ρωμανού Α' Λεκαπηνού (920-44) για την περίοδο 925-33 [έκδ., J. Darrouzès et L.Q. Westerink, *Théodore Daphnopatés, Correspondance* (Paris, 1978)]. Μεταξύ των σαράντα περίπου επιστολών του των σχετικών με Αρμενικά ζητήματα, μία (η υπ' αριθ. 4) απευθύνεται στον ... « Έμίρη τής Αίγύπτου »! Παρά τον προβληματικό της τίτλο, η επιστολή αυτή δεν παύει να αποτελεί μέρος της επί ανωτάτου επιπέδου διπλωματικής αλληλογραφίας του δεκάτου αιώνα. Στην επιστολή γίνεται η συνήθης δήλωση ότι ο Θεός είναι δημιουργός όλων των ανθρώπων οι οποίοι καλούνται να ζήσουν μεταξύ τους ειρηνικά. Η επιστολή δεν ζητάει από τον παραλήπτη της να υποταχθεί, αλλά να συμπεριφέρεται ως « φίλος »· προσέγγιση Νικόλαου Μυστικού.

Στη θεολογική και ιδεολογική διαμάχη με το Ισλάμ δεν δίστασαν να εμπλακούν, δημόσια ή ιδιωτικά, και βυζαντινοί αυτοκράτορες. Ένα ιδιότυπο αλλ' όχι επιτυχές παράδειγμα είναι αυτό του Κωνταντίνου Ζ' Πορφυρογέννητου (944-59). Στο

ατιτλοφόρητο έργο του « Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ῥωμανὸν τὸν θεοστεφὴ καὶ πορφυρογέννητον βασιλέα » το οποίο μετὰ την ἔκδοσή του ἀπὸ τον Meursius το 1611 παρέμεινε γνωστὸ στην ἱστορία ὡς *De Administrando Imperio* [*Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio*, ἔκδ. Gy. Moravcsik], ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος περιλαμβάνει ἐννέα ἀσύνδετα κεφάλαια (14–22), διαφόρου μεγέθους, τὰ ὁποῖα σχετίζονται με τὸ Ἰσλάμ. Τὰ κεφάλαια αὐτὰ ἀναφέρονται στα « Περὶ τῆς γενεαλογίας τοῦ Μουχούμετ [Μωάμεθ] » (ὅπου ἐπαναλαμβάνεται ἡ περὶ ἐπιληψίας θεωρία τοῦ Θεοφάνη), στα « Περὶ τοῦ γένους τῶν Φατεμιτῶν [Φατιμιδῶν] », στα περὶ τῆς ἐξόδου τῶν Αράβων ἀπὸ τὴν Αραβικὴ χερσόνησο, στὸν θάνατο τοῦ Μωάμεθ, καὶ στους τρεῖς πρῶτους διαδόχους του, Abū Bakr, Ὑμαρ καὶ Ὑθμᾶν. Δύο ἐκτενέστερα κεφάλαια ἀσχολοῦνται με τὸν Μωάμεθ, τὸν πρῶτο χαλίφη τῆς δυναστείας τῶν Ουμαγιαδῶν ὁ ὁποῖος κυβέρνησε ἀπὸ τὴ Δαμασκὸ. Τὰ κεφάλαια αὐτὰ, δανεισμένα ἀπὸ τὸν « θεῖο » Θεοφάνη, ὅπως τὸν ὀνομάζει ὁ Πορφυρογέννητος, δὲν προσθέτουν τίποτε τὸ ἰδιαιτεροστὴν περὶ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ θεώρηση τοῦ Βυζαντίου, ἢ στὴν περὶ τῶν Βυζαντινο-Αραβικῶν σχέσεων ἱστορία. Ἐπαναλαμβάνουν ἀπλῶς τὶς ἀπόκρυφες « πληροφορίες » καὶ τοὺς βαρεῖς χαρακτηρισμοὺς τοῦ Θεοφάνη. Ἐτσι, ἀντιπάθειες, στρεβλώσεις καὶ ἱστορικὲς ἀνακρίβειες περιβάλλονται τῶρα με τὸ κύρος τῆς αυτοκρατορικῆς πορφύρας καὶ (σε ἓνα ἔργο το ὁποῖο ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος φιλοδοξοῦσε νὰ γίνῃ ἓνα εἶδος ἐγχειριδίου διακυβέρνησης, ἐθιμοτυπίας, τελετουργικῆς καὶ ἐξωτερικῆς πολιτικῆς τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ κράτους γιὰ τὸν « θεοστεφὴ » υἱὸν του) παίρνουν τὴ μορφή αυτοκρατορικῆς διαθήκης!

Ὁ ἐνδέκατος αἰώνας εἶναι ἰδιαιτέρα σημαντικὸς ἀπὸ πλευρᾶς διαμόρφωσης σχέσεων Βυζαντίου καὶ Ἰσλάμ, καὶ ἀντι-Ἰσλαμικῆς γραμματείας. Στὸν αἰῶνα αὐτὸν τοῦ σχίσματος καὶ τῶν σταυροφοριῶν Βυζάντιο καὶ Ἰσλάμ ἀντιμετώπισαν μίαν κοινὴ πρόκληση – τὴν ἡγεμονία τῆς Λατινικῆς Χριστιανοσύνης: τὸ μὲν Βυζάντιο ὑπὸ τὴ μορφή ἀπολυταρχίας ἐξαιτίας τῶν περὶ πρωτείου Παπικῶν αξιώσεων οἱ ὁποῖες κορυφώθηκαν με τὸ σχίσμα (1054), τὸ δε Ἰσλάμ ὑπὸ τὴ μορφή μισαλλοδοξίας ἡ ὁποῖα κορυφώθηκε (σάραντα ἓνα χρόνια μετὰ τὸ σχίσμα) με τὴν κήρυξη τῆς Πρώτης Σταυροφορίας (1095). Τὸ πρῶτο συμβάν ἴσως νὰ ἐπιτάχυνε τὸ δεύτερο. Πάντως τὰ δύο αὐτὰ γεγονότα συνδέονται μετὰξὺ τοὺς ἄμεσα, ὁ δε ψυχολογικὸς δεσμὸς τοὺς κρατᾶ μέχρι σήμερα. Τόσο τὸ σχίσμα ὅσο καὶ ἡ Πρῶτη Σταυροφορία, διατάραξαν βαθειὰ τὴν ἐξέλιξη τῶν ἰδιαιτερῶν σχέσεων Ὀρθόδοξο Χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ Ἰσλάμ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν Ἰσλαμο-Χριστιανικῶν σχέσεων γενικότερα. Στὴν πραγματικότητα, τὰ δύο αὐτὰ καίρια γεγονότα εἶχαν μεγαλύτερη, καὶ δυσμενέστερη, ἐπίδραση στὸ Βυζάντιο καὶ στὴν Ὀρθοδοξία παρά στὸ Ἰσλάμ καὶ στὸν Μουσουλμανικὸ κόσμον – ἓνας ἀκόμη λόγος γιὰ τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζουν ἕκτοτε τὸ Ἰσλάμ καὶ τοὺς Μουσουλμάνους με μίαν ἰδιότυπη δυσπιστία. Ἡ Μουσουλμανικὴ κοινότητα δὲν ἐπηρεάστηκε σημαντικὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς σταυροφόρους τῆς Πρώτης Σταυροφορίας. Ὅταν αὐτοὶ κατέλαβαν τὴν Ἀντιόχεια (1098) καὶ τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ (1099) τὸ Ἰσλάμ, τὸ ὁποῖο βρισκόταν ὑπὸ τὴν ἀναδυόμενη ἡγεσία τῶν Σελτζούκων Τούρκων, ἀναδεικνυόταν δυνατότερο καὶ καλύτερα ὀργανωμένο στὴν Ἀσία καὶ στὴ Βορειοδυτικὴ Ἰνδία. Μολονότι

για ενάμισι περίπου αιώνες οι σταυροφόροι διατήρησαν κάποια βάση στη Συρία και στην Παλαιστίνη, η κατάκτησή τους αυτή δεν αποτελούσε για τους Μουσουλμάνους παρά ένα παραμεθόριο επεισόδιο. Όμως αυτό που ήταν « παραμεθόριο » επεισόδιο για τους Μουσουλμάνους εξαιτίας των Δυτικών Χριστιανών, συνιστούσε για τους Βυζαντινούς έκρηξη στην καρδιά του Βυζαντινού κράτους εξαιτίας του Ισλάμ! Όπως απέδειξε περίτρανα η Τετάρτη Σταυροφορία (1204), ο ιερός πόλεμος της Δύσης κατά του Ισλάμ ελλόχευε μεγαλύτερο κίνδυνο κατά του Βυζαντίου και του Βυζαντινού Χριστιανισμού παρά για το Ισλάμ και τον Μουσουλμανικό κόσμο· και αυτός ο κίνδυνος άρχισε να απασχολεί τους Βυζαντινούς περισσότερο από οποιαδήποτε άλλη άσκηση πολεμικής κατά του Ισλάμ, η οποία εν πάση περιπτώσει θα μπορούσε να συνεχιστεί και με μία τυφλή επανάληψη υπαρχουσών ήδη αντιρρητικών από το παρελθόν.

Το σχίσμα και εν συνεχεία οι σταυροφορίες απέσπασαν την προσοχή των Βυζαντινών από το Ισλάμ και την μετέθεσαν στη Ρώμη. Τα δύο αυτά γεγονότα οδήγησαν τους Βυζαντινούς ν' αναζητήσουν νόημα στη έννοια του « Ανατολικός ». Όσο αυτή η διαδικασία αυτογνωσίας βάθαινε τόσο η δυνατότητα ένωσης με τη Ρώμη εξασθενούσε! Οι διάφορες προσπάθειες ένωσης καταδείκνυαν όχι τόσο τη συνοχή και αλληλεγγύη μεταξύ των δύο « μορφών » Χριστιανισμού, όσο τη διαφορετικότητα τους. Όσο δε η « Ανατολική » ιδιοσυγκρασία αρθρωνόταν πιο ευδιάκριτα, τόσο καταφανής γινόταν η συγγένειά της με την καθαυτό Ισλαμική νοοτροπία και ήθος. Είναι μέσα σ' αυτό το ψυχολογικό και ηθοπλαστικό πλαίσιο όπου μπορεί κανείς να καταλάβει καλύτερα την αντίδραση του αυτοκράτορα Μανουήλ Α' Κομνηνού (1143–80) εναντίον του αναθέματος κατά του « Θεού του Μωάμεθ » και τη διαγραφή του αναθέματος από την Ακολουθία απόταξης για τον επιστρέφοντα από το Ισλάμ στον Χριστιανισμό [PG 140:124A–36C] στην οποίαν αφερθήκαμε νωρίτερα. Τη διαγραφή αυτή πέτυχε ο Μανουήλ προς το τέλος της ζωής του (Μάρτιο-Μάιο του 1180) ύστερα από σκληρό αγώνα με την ιεραρχία του Πατριαρχείου. Είναι επίσης ενδιαφέρον ότι τριάντα πέντε χρόνια νωρίτερα (τον Αύγουστο του 1146) απαντώντας στην αναγγελία της Δεύτερης Σταυροφορίας, ο ίδιος Μανουήλ εξέφραζε διπλωματικά την ικανοποίησή του προς τον Πάπα Ευγένιο ΙΙΙ για τη « συγκίνησιν » (μία από τις ακαθόριστες και ουδέτερες εκφράσεις των Βυζαντινών για τα σταυροφορικά κινήματα), « ... ως εις ώφέλειαν τών Χριστιανών γενησομένην και κατάπτωσιν και άφανισμόν τών άθέων έχθρών του Θεού ». Η στάση του Μανουήλ δείχνει τάση προς πλήρη ψυχολογική ανεξαρτησία τόσο από την ηγεμονία του Ισλαμικού όσο και από την ηγεμονία του Παπικού παράγοντα.

Ο Μανουήλ, περίοπος των Κομνηνών αυτοκρατόρων, ήταν αυτοκράτορας δυναμικός, με πάθος προς τα θεολογικά και θερμός υποστηρικτής του μοναχισμού, στη σωστή του θέση. Μολονότι διαλλακτικός, ήταν αντίθετος προς την αίρεση. Στο θέμα του *filioque* δεν δίστασε να καταδικάσει με σύνοδο τον προσωπικό του απεσταλμένο στη Δύση, επίσκοπο Δημήτριο της Λάμπης, για τις διδασκαλίες του περί υποταγής

του αγίου Πνεύματος στον Θεό-Πατέρα. Στον αγώνα του κατά της παρερμηνείας του Ισλαμικού χαρακτηρισμού του Θεού ως « *όλοσφυρος* » αντιμετώπισε όχι μόνο την άγνοια των επισκόπων του πατριαρχείου αλλά και την ευγλωττία και βιαιότητα του λόγιου Αρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης Ευσταθίου (ca. 1115–95/6). Επηρεασμένος από την κομφόρτητα της κλασικής παιδείας, τον Όμηρο, τον Πίνδαρο, τον Αριστοφάνη και τον Ιωάννη τον Δαμασκηνό, για τους οποίους είχε γράψει σχόλια, ο Ευστάθιος δεν ανεχόταν θεολογικές « *χονδρότητες* » σαν αυτές τις οποίες, κατ' αυτόν, εξέφραζε το Ισλάμ. Στην πολεμική του ο Ευστάθιος αντέφασκε με τον εαυτόν του. Αφενός μεν δεχόταν ότι ο Θεός του Ισλάμ ήταν « *όλοσφυρος* », (δηλαδή « *τι* » παρά Όν), κάτι το οποίον δεν υπέφερε (« *μη* *ένεγκών Θεόν* *άληθινόν δοξάζεσθαι* *όλοσφυρόν τι διανοίας* *ανάπλασμα* *κακοδαίμονος* »), αφετέρου όμως εξίσωνε αυτόν τον Θεό με τον ίδιο τον Μωάμεθ: « *Έσοίμην* *άν καταπεπατημένον* *τοίς* *πτέρναις* *φορών* *τόν* *έγκέφαλον*, *και* *τού* *σχήματος* *τούτου* *παράπαν* *ανάξιος*, *εί* *Θεόν* *ήγοίμην* *άληθινόν* *τόν* *παιδεραστήν* *και* *καμηλώδη* *και* *πάσης* *πράξεως* *μισσαράς* *ύφηγητήν* *και* *διδάσκαλον* » [Νικήτα Χωνιάτη, *Ίστορία*, έκδ., J.L. van Dieten (Berlin-New York, 1975)]! Είναι φανερό ότι τη σκέψη του Ευσταθίου διακατείχε ο Μωάμεθ μάλλον παρά το Ισλάμ και η θεολογία του. Τίποτε από ό,τι δίδασκε το Ισλάμ δεν είχε γι' αυτόν σημασία. Το θέμα του « *όλοσφυρος* » ήταν απλώς συμπτωματικό. Έτσι, η παντελής απορρόφησή του από τον δικό του τρόπο του σκέπτεσθαι και η ψύχωσή του με τον Μωάμεθ οδήγησαν για πρώτη φορά σε μία εξίσωση του Ισλάμ με τον Μωάμεθ, ή ακόμη και του Θεού με τον Μωάμεθ – σε ένα « *Μωαμεθανισμό* », δηλαδή, στην πιο παιδαριώδη μορφή του!

Η διαμάχη του « *όλοσφυρος* » κατέληξε σε μονομαχία μεταξύ αυτοκράτορα και Αρχιεπισκόπου. Σ' αυτήν χρειάστηκε η επιχειρηματολογία του αποθνήσκοντα Μανουήλ για να απαλλάξει τον Ευστάθιο από το πλέγμα αυτού του παραλογισμού. Μόνο με την επέμβαση του μετριοπαθούς Πατριάρχη Θεοδοσίου Α' Βορραδιώτη (1178–83), ο οποίος εξευμένισε τον επικρατήσαντα αυτοκράτορα, αποφεύχθηκε η τιμωρία του Ευσταθίου. Ο Μανουήλ δέχτηκε τις δικαιολογίες του και συγχώρησε τον Ευστάθιο, όχι όμως πριν τον επιπλήξει με ιδιαίτερη αυστηρότητα: « *Δεί* *σε* *σοφόν* *όντα* *μη* *αίσχρορρήμονα* *δείκνυσθαι* *μηδέ* *θρασυστομείν* *παρακαίρια* ». Ο σοφός δεν πρέπει να αποδεικνύεται αισχρολόγος, ή να μιλάει παράκαιρα και με θρασύτητα! Αυτή η διαμάχη πάντως δεν εμπόδισε τον υψηλό εκκλησιαστικό να γράψει ένα διθυραμβικό επικήδειο για τον μεγάλο αυτοκράτορα.

Ο πολυγραφότατος μοναχός και απολογητικός θεολόγος του 11<sup>ου</sup> αι., Ευθύμιος Ζιγαβηνός, στο αντιαιρετικό του έργο *Πανοπλία Δογματική* [PG 130:33–1361] το οποίον έγραψε κατά προτροπή Αλεξίου Α' του Κομνηνού (1081–1118) για την εναντίον των Βογομίλων σύνοδο της Κωνσταντινούπολης (1110–11), αφιερώνει το τελευταίο κεφάλαιο (αριθ. 28) « *Κατά* *Σαρακηνών* » [PG 130:1332–60]. Εκεί επαναλαμβάνει πεπατημένες « *πληροφορίες* », χαρακτηρισμούς και θέσεις προερχόμενες από τον Θεοφάνη, τον Γεώργιο Αμαρτωλό και τον Βαρθολομαίο Εδέσσης. Έτσι και η περί του « *όλοσφύρου* » Θεού διαστρέβλωση του Βαρθολομαίου απέκτησε εμμέσως συνοδική

πιστοποίηση! Το ίδιο και ο σύγχρονός του ιστορικός Γεώργιος Κεδρηνός (12<sup>ος</sup> αι.) [*Σύνοψις ιστοριών*, έκδ., I. Bekker, *Georgius Cedrenus* 2 τόμοι (Bonn, 1838–39)]. Πιο πρωτότυπο και πολύ πιο ενδιαφέρον είναι ένα συντομότερο κείμενο του Ζιγαβηνού με τίτλο *Διάλεξις μετά Σαρακηνού Φιλοσόφου περί Πίστεως ἐν τῇ πόλει Μελιτηνῆς* [PG 131:20–40]. Σ' αυτή τη *Διάλεξη* Σαρακηνός φέρεται να είναι κάποιος διανοούμενος, τον οποίον ο Ευθύμιος χαρακτηρίζει ως «*σοφώτατον*», ενώ Χριστιανός συνομιλητής του ο ίδιος ο Ευθύμιος. Ο Σαρακηνός εμφανίζεται ιδιαίτερα ενήμερος στα περί Χριστιανισμού, περισσότερο από ό,τι ο Ευθύμιος στα περί του Ισλάμ. Στο τέλος του διαλόγου ο Σαρακηνός φέρεται να ομολογεί την ήττα του και να ζητά να βαπτιστεί:

Νενίκημαι, νενίκημαι. Ὡ πῶς μεγάλη ἡ πίστις τῶν Χριστιανῶν! Χάριν οὖν ἔχω σοι περὶ τῆς θεογνωσίας ταύτης, ᾧ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἄνθρωπε· τὰ γὰρ παρ' ὑμῶν λεγόμενα τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀληθῆ εἰσιν· Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς μαρτυρεῖ· καὶ δεῦρο, δοῦλε Θεοῦ, βάπτισόν με.

131:37C

Ο Νικήτας Χωνιάτης (1155/7–1217) στον οποίον αναφερθήκαμε προηγουμένως, ήταν γόνος περιφανούς οικογένειας των Χωνών, απ' όπου ο δάσκαλος του σχεδόν συγχρόνου του Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (1207–73/4), μυστικού του Ισλάμ. Νέος στην ηλικία έφυγε για την Κωνσταντινούπολη όπου, υπό την κηδεμονία του αδελφού του, ασχολήθηκε με τις κλασικές και θεολογικές σπουδές. Έγινε μαθητής του Ευσταθίου Θεσσαλονίκης, δημόσιος λειτουργός, αυτοκρατορικός γραμματέας και, επί της δυναστείας των Αγγέλων, ανώτατος αυτοκρατορικός λειτουργός. Με την κατάληψη της Κωνσταντινούπολης από τους σταυροφόρους (Τετάρτη Σταυροφορία, 1204) έφυγε με τον αυτοκράτορα στη Νίκαια. Εκτός από ιστορικά, ποιητικά και ρητορικά έργα έγραψε και απολογητικά. Είναι ο τελευταίος απολογητικός της περιόδου των Κομνηνών. Στο έργο του *Θησαυρός Ὁρθοδοξίας* (συνέχεια, τρόπον τινα, της *Πανοπλίας Δογματικῆς* του Ζιγαβηνού) περιέχεται ένα κεφάλαιο (αριθ. 20) «*Περὶ τῆς θρησκείας τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν*» [PG 140:105A–22C], το οποίο δεν είναι παρά μία αντιγραφή σε εκτενέστερη κάπως μορφή τού κατά των Ισμαηλιτῶν κεφαλαίου στο «*Περὶ Αἱρέσεων*» του Ιωάννου του Δαμασκηνοῦ (κεφ. 100/1). Ακολουθεῖ η «*Τάξις γινομένη ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσι πρὸς τὴν καθαρὰν καὶ ἀληθῆ πίστιν ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν*» [PG 140:124A–36C]. Στην ακολουθία αυτή ύστερα από μία μακρὰ σειρά αποτάξεων (ἢ αναθεματισμῶν) ο προσερχόμενος στο βάπτισμα καλεῖται να εκφωνήσει το ακόλουθο ανάθεμα:

Καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τούτοις ἀναθεματίζω τὸν Θεὸν τοῦ Μωάμεθ, περὶ οὗ λέγει αὐτός ἐστι Θεὸς εἷς ὁλόσφυρος [ἕς] οὐκ ἐγέννησεν οὐδὲ ἐγεννήθη, οὐδὲ ἐγένετο ὁμοῖος αὐτῷ τις.

PG 140:134A

Είναι αυτό το ανάθεμα το οποίο ο Μανουήλ Α' Κομνηνός αξίωσε να απαλειφθεί από την ακολουθία ως βλάσφημο κατά του Θεού!

Ήδη από τον δωδέκατο αιώνα φαίνεται να έχει εκλείψει οποιαδήποτε πρωτοτυπία, θετική ή αρνητική, ως προς την περιγραφή ή την επιχειρηματολογική αντιμετώπιση του Ισλάμ. Το Ισλάμ για τους Βυζαντινούς δεν ήταν πλέον νεοφανής θρησκεία, ή αίρεση. Η αντι-Ισλαμική αντιρρητική είχε περιέλθει στο χώρο της καθημερινής λαϊκής διαμάχης και στο χώρο κράτους και εξουσίας – με όλες τις εκφράσεις φιλοφροσύνης, ή βιαιότητας και αδιαλλαξίας, τις οποίες διαμόρφωναν η κατά καιρούς δύναμη ή αδυναμία της Βυζαντινής, ή της Μουσουλμανικής, αρχής. Αναφορικά προς τη δεύτερη περίπτωση κράτους και εξουσίας, επισημαίνουμε τον Δημήτριο Χωματιανό, Αρχιεπίσκοπο Οχρίδας (1217–1235). Κατ' αυτόν, τρεις ήσαν οι εχθροί της Βυζαντινής Ορθοδοξίας στην εποχή του: οι Εβραίοι, οι Αρμένιοι και οι Μουσουλμάνοι. Δεν περιλαμβάνει τους Λατίνους (ιδιαίτερα τους Σταυροφόρους της Δ' Σταυροφορίας) ή τους Βογόμιλους της Βοσνίας! Κατά τον Χωματιανό, η επίσημη πολιτική προς τις ως άνω τρεις κοινότητες έπρεπε να είναι η εξής: να τους επιτρέπεται να ζουν μεταξύ των Ορθοδόξων, να προστατεύεται η ζωή τους, να μην υποχρεώνονται να αλλαξοπιστήσουν, να μην εξορίζονται, αλλά να ζουν σε διακριτά διαμερίσματα των πόλεων έτσι ώστε οι θρησκευτικές τους τελετές και δραστηριότητες να μη προσβάλλουν τους Χριστιανούς. Εάν επιθυμούσαν να δραστηριοποιούνται έξω από το γκέτο τους, αυτό έπρεπε να γίνεται με την ελάχιστη δυνατή ελευθερία ώστε ο περιορισμός τους να ενεργεί ως κίνητρο μεταστραφής τους στην 'Ορθόδοξη πίστη εφόσον θα αναζητούσαν μια πιο άνετη ζωή! Οι θέσεις του Χωματιανού θυμίζουν αυτές του συγχρόνου του Πάπα Ιννοκέντιου ΙΙΙ (1198–1216) του Πάπα της Τετάρτης Σταυροφορίας, του μεγαλύτερου των Μέσων Χρόνων, και τα μέτρα τα οποία έλαβε η Τετάρτη Λατερανή Σύνοδος (1215, η ΙΒ' των Καθολικών) η οποία υποχρέωσε Εβραίους και Μουσουλμάνους να φορούν διακριτή ένδυση και να μην εμφανίζονται δημοσία κατά τη διάρκεια της Μεγάλης Εβδομάδας.

Όσον αφορά στις λαϊκές διαμάχες, ένα δείγμα αυτών είναι ένα, τρόπον τινα, πνευματικό ανθολόγιο υπό την επωνυμία «Θησαυρός» [έκδ., Joseph A. Munitiz, *Theognosti Thesaurus* (Leuven, 1979)], γραμμένο για τον μέσο Βυζαντινό αναγνώστη από κάποιον αινιγματικό συγγραφέα του πρώτου τετάρτου του 13<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα υπό το όνομα Θεόγνωστος. Ανήκει στην κατηγορία βιβλίων λαϊκής θεολογίας, το οποίον έχει περάσει απαρατήρητο από τους ερευνητές της Βυζαντινής φιλολογίας και θεολογίας. Στην πραγματικότητα αποτελεί ένα είδος κατήχησης περί της Ορθοδόξου πίστεως. Το υλικό διαιρείται σε τέσσερεις ενότητες και είκοσι άνισα κεφάλαια. Το δέκατο κεφάλαιο αναφέρεται στους κινδύνους της αποστασίας, ένα κύριο θέμα της εποχής. Για να συμπληρώσει τη δογματική ενότητα, ο συγγραφέας προσθέτει τέσσερα ακόμη κεφάλαια. Στο ενδέκατο κεφάλαιο κάνει απολογητική και συγκριτική μελέτη μεταξύ Χριστιανικής πίστης και Ισλάμ στην οποίαν αντιπαραβάλλει «τὴν στενήν» οδὸ του Χριστιανισμού τὴν «ἀπάγουσαν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν» με «τὴν πλατείαν καὶ



εὐρύχωρον τὴν ἀπάγουσαν εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν» (κατὰ το Ματθ. 7:13), προφανῶς τὴν οδὸ του Ἰσλάμ:

Ἐρώτησον καὶ τοὺς τοῦ μέρους Μωάμεθ. «Τί θαυμαστόν ἰδόντες αὐτὸν πράττοντα, ἢ ποῖα ἐργαζόμενον σημεῖα, ὡς Θεοῦ προφήτην ἐδέξασθε ἅμα καὶ ἐσεβάσθητε, ἢ δῆλον ὅτι τὴν πλατεῖαν καὶ εὐρύχωρον καὶ ἀπάγουσαν πρὸς τὴν ἀπώλειαν ὑμῶν ὀδηγοῦντα καὶ ἐκδιδάσκοντα; Ποῖαν γὰρ θάλασσαν ἔτεμεν ὡς ὁ Μωϋσῆς; Ποῖον μάννα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κατήγαγεν, ἢ ποῖας πλάκας θεογράφους ἐνεχειρίσθη, ὅτι παρὰ πάντας αὐτῷ ὑπηκούσατε καὶ μετὰ πάντων ληρωδιῶν καὶ τὴν πρὸς νότον προσκύνησιν πρὸς αὐτοῦ παρελάβετε; Φεῦ, οἶα πλάνη ὁ ἀπατεῶν ὑμᾶς περιέβαλε, παρηλλαγμένη ζωῆ καὶ πολιτεία καὶ ξένη τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τῶν γραφῶν, Θεοῦ τῆς σωστικῆς καὶ ἀληθοῦς ὑμᾶς ἐπιγνώσεως ἀπαλλοτριώσας.

Πιο έντονος ἀπὸ τον Θεόγνωστο εμφανίζεται ένας άλλος μοναχός, λόγιος, μεταφραστής Λατινικῶν έργων, αυτοκρατορικός αντιγραφείας καὶ επιστολογράφος, ο Μανουήλ-Μάξιμος Πλανούδης (ca.1255–ca.1305), του οποίου το ὄφος καὶ τα συναισθήματα εκπλήσσουν τον αναγνώστη. Σε δύο ἀπὸ τις 28 επιστολές [*Epistulae*, ἐκδ. Μ. Treu (Breslau, 1890)] τις οποίες ἔστειλε στον νεαρό στρατηγὸ Ἀλέξιο Φιλανθρωπινὸ (ca.1270–ca. 1323) τον Δεκέμβριο του 1295, εκφράζει τη χαρὰ του για τις νίκες του στη Μικρὰ Ἀσία κατὰ των «Περσῶν» (Τούρκων) καὶ για τα λάφυρα του πολέμου τα οποία ἔστειλε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Θα ἐπιθυμοῦσε μάλιστα, ὅπως γράφει, να του εἶχε στείλει το δέρμα καὶ τα κεφάλια των βαρβάρων αν δεν τον ἤξερε ὅτι ἦταν τόσο «φιλόφρωνος»! Ο Φιλανθρωπινός εἶχε, κατὰ τον Πλανούδη, αιχμαλωτίσει τόσους Τούρκους ὥστε η τιμὴ ενός σκλάβου στη Μικρὰ Ἀσία εἶχε πέσει χαμηλότερα ἀπὸ αὐτὴν ενός προβάτου!

Ο 14<sup>ος</sup> εἶναι αἰώνας σκληρῶν πολεμικῶν καὶ διπλωματικῶν ἀγῶνων του Βυζαντίου με τους Οθωμανούς. Οἱ ὅποιοι ἐλιγμοὶ καὶ διαθρησκευτικοὶ γάμοι δεν ἔχουν καρποφορήσει. Ο Ἰωάννης Στ' Καντακουζηνός (1347–54) εἶχε δώσει τὴν κόρη του Θεοδώρα ὡς σύζυγο στον ἐμίρη Ορχάν της Βιθυνίας για να παγιώσει κάποια συνθήκη, χωρίς ὁμως αὐτὸ να ἐμποδίσει τον Ορχάν να συμμαχήσει με τον Γαλατὰ ἐναντίον του (1352)! Το Ἰσλάμ θεωρεῖται ὡς μέσον τιμωρίας του Θεοῦ κατὰ της Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἀνάδειξης νεομαρτύρων. Ο ἅγιος Νικήτας μαρτύρησε στη Νύσσα γύρω στο 1300. Ο Μιχαήλ ο Νέος μαρτύρησε στην Αἴγυπτο ἐπὶ βασιλείας Ἀνδρόνικου Β' Παλαιολόγου (1282–1328). Τον Μάρτιο του 1348 οἱ στρατιῶτες της Φιλαδέλφειας οἱ οποίοι πολεμοῦσαν τον Aydin-oglu ηττήθηκαν καὶ σκοτώθηκαν. Σύμφωνα με το *Συναξάριον* στεφανώθηκαν στον Παράδεισο. Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ Τούρκοι με τους Τούρκους ὡς «Πέρσες» ἢ «Αχαιμενίδες» ἀνασύρουν ἱστορικές μνήμες μιας κυριολεκτικὰ σταυροφορικής ἐποχῆς (αὐτῆς του Ηρακλείου) κατὰ των Περσῶν – μια ἐπίσης ἀναβίωση του θριάμβου του Μ. Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐναντίον της δυναστείας των Αχαιμενιδῶν! Ἐτσι,

για τον πολυμαθή ιστορικό Νικηφόρο Γρηγορά (ca. 1290/1–1358/61), τον μοναχό και αρχηγό των θεολόγων της αντι-Παλαμικής μερίδας, οι πόλεμοι των Τούρκων κατά του Βυζαντίου δεν αποτελούσαν παρά αναβίωση των Περσικών πολέμων και μία νέα επίθεση βαρβάρων κατά του πολιτισμού [Ἐπιστολή 152, έκδ. R. Guiland, *Correspondance de Nicéphore Grégoras* (Paris, 1927), 237–41].

Σε ένα τέτοιο κλίμα τοποθετείται η ζωή και η δράση του Γρηγορίου Παλαμά (1296–1360), Αρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης και ηγέτη των ησυχαστών. Στις αρχές του 1354 ο Παλαμάς ταξίδευε με αυτοκρατορικό πλοίο στην Κωνσταντινούπολη σε μία αποστολή συμφιλίωσης μεταξύ του νεαρού αυτοεξόριστου Ιωάννη Ε' Παλαιολόγου (1341–91) και του Μεγάλου Δομέστικου Ιωάννη Καντακουζηνού ο οποίος με το θάνατο του Ανδρόνικου Γ' Παλαιολόγου είχε αυτοανακηρυχθεί αυτοκράτορας. Η πράξη αυτή είχε οδηγήσει σ' έναν εξαιρετή εμφύλιο πόλεμο (1341–47). Μέχρι την Τένεδο το ταξίδι του Παλαμά ήταν ατάραχο. Αναχωρώντας όμως από την Τένεδο το πλοίο έπεσε σε τρικυμία η οποία ανάγκασε τον κυβερνήτη να το προσλιμενίσει στην Καλλίπολη, στην Ευρωπαϊκή πλευρά των στενών του Ελλησπόντου. Η Καλλίπολη μόλις είχε υποστεί φοβερό σεισμό και, ανυπεράσπιστη, είχε καταληφθεί από τους Τούρκους (2 Μαρτίου, 1354) [Apostolos Karpozilos, George M. Parassoglou, « Διήγησις Βασιλέων τών Ἰσμηλιτών. A short chronicle », *Byzantion* 42 (1972), 73–87]. Ανήμπορο ν' αναχωρήσει, το πλοίο καταλήφθηκε με το πλήρωμα και τους επιβάτες του από τους Τούρκους οι οποίοι απαιτούσαν λύτρα για την απελευθέρωσή τους. Με ανεπαρκή επικοινωνία και με την τιμή των λύτρων ν' ανεβαίνει καθόσον γινόταν πιο γνωστή η ταυτότητα του Παλαμά, άρχισε μία μακρά περίοδος αιχμαλωσίας η οποία περιέφερε τον Αρχιεπίσκοπο και τους συνταξιδιώτες του μέσα από διάφορες πόλεις ανά τη Μ. Ασία. Η αιχμαλωσία διήρκεσε 16 μήνες (Μάρτιος 1354 – Ιούλιος 1355). Η όλη αυτή εμπειρία της αιχμαλωσίας και του παζαρέματος λύτρων δεν ήταν, ασφαλώς, ούτε ευχάριστη ούτε τιμητική για τον Παλαμά. Εν τούτοις η συμπεριφορά του λαού και των Τούρκων αξιωματούχων προς αυτόν φαίνεται να ήταν γενικά ευγενική και αξιοπρεπής. Τα γεγονότα τα οποία οδήγησαν στην αιχμαλωσία, τις επαφές του με Χριστιανούς στη Μ. Ασία, τις εντυπώσεις του από τη θρησκευτική ζωή των Τούρκων, τις εμπειρίες και τις συζητήσεις του με τον Ορχάν, Μουσουλμάνο αξιωματούχο (σουλτάνο;), τον Ισμαήλ, εγγονό « τοῦ μεγάλου Ἀμηρά », καθώς και με τους Χιόνες, θρησκευτικούς συμβούλους του Ορχάν, περιγράφει ο Παλαμάς σε μία εκτενή ποιμαντική επιστολή του προς τους Θεσσαλονικείς [έκδ., Κ. Διοβουνιώτη, « Γρηγορίου Παλαμά Ἐπιστολή πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς », *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 16 (1922), 3–21] – μία σημαντική ιστορική πηγή για την εποχή, τα γεγονότα, τον ίδιο, καθώς και για το Ισλάμ στην Ανατολία τον 14<sup>ον</sup> αιώνα. Την έγραψε πιθανώς τον Ιούλιο του 1355. Στην επιστολή αυτή ο Παλαμάς αποδεικνύεται ακριβής, μετριοπαθής, ενημερωτικός και διδακτικός, χωρίς όμως να φείδεται της κριτικής. Μιλáει για την οικονομία του Θεού η οποία αποκαλύπτει « τὰ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ... καὶ αὐτοῖς τοῖς πάντων βαρβάρων βαρβάρους ». Θεωρεῖ το Ισλάμ ως Μωαμεθανισμό, καθόσον οι Τούρκοι

« ἐπίστευσαν καὶ ἐσεβάσθησαν καὶ ἠκολούθησαν ἀνθρώπῳ ψιλῷ τε καὶ θνητῷ καὶ τεθαμμένῳ, Μωάμεθ », σε αντίθεση προς την πίστη των Χριστιανῶν οι οποίοι ἐπίστευσαν εἰς Χριστὸν « τοὔτέστι θεάνθρωπον λόγον ». Γνωρίζει ὅτι οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι πιστεύουν « λόγον εἶναι τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν Χριστον καὶ ἐκ παρθένου γεννηθῆναι τῆς Μαρίας », « καὶ πνοὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ Χριστὸν », πίστη ἡ ὁποία αποτυπώνεται συχνὰ στο Κοράνιο [σούρα 3:39, 45, 4:171 καὶ 2:87, 253, 3: 45, 4:157, 171, 5:46, 75, 110, 112, 114, 116, 19:34, 33:7, 57:27, 61:6, 14 καὶ 4:171 καὶ 3:45, 4:172, 5:17, 72, 75, 9:30,31]. Στους διαλόγους του με Μουσουλμάνους ἀξιωματοῦχους ἀπαντᾶ σε ὅλα τα θέματα τα ὁποῖα του τίθενται με λεπτότητα καὶ ἀκρίβεια. Ἀπὸ τὴν προσωπικὴ του παρατήρηση δίνει μίᾳ ἐμπειριστατωμένη εἰκόνα τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ζωῆς των Μουσουλμάνων ἐνῶ κλείνει τὴν Ἐπιστολὴ με τὴν ἐξῆς ἐκπληκτικὴ παραίνεση προς τοὺς, ὅπως διαφαίνεται, ἀτάσθαλους Θεσσαλονικεῖς:

Ὅρατε μὴ τοῖς κακόφροσι τούτοις παραπλήσιόν τι πάσχητε, οὐκ ἐπὶ τῆς θεοσεβείας λέγω, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῆς πολιτείας, ὅπερ ἐπὶ δογμάτων οὗτοι σκοπεῖτε γὰρ μὴ καθάπερ οὗτοι λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πνοὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ Χριστὸν τοὔτέστι θεάνθρωπον τὸν ἐκ παρθένου τεχθέντα λέγουσιν. εἶτα ὡς μὴ Θεὸν ὄντα τοῦτον φεύγουσι φρενοβλαβῶς καὶ ἀθετοῦσιν. οὕτω καὶ ὑμεῖς εὐρεθῆτε τὰς ἀρετὰς καὶ τὰς εὐαγγελικὰς ἐντολὰς.... Εἰπέ, πῶς σοι τῶν ἀπίστων πιστεύσειε λέγοντι πιστεύειν εἰς τὴν παρθένον καὶ [τὸν] ἐκ παρθένου τεχθέντα ... μῆτε γοῦν σωφροσύνην ἀσκοῦντι ... καὶ τῇ ἀκολασίᾳ ἐκδεδομένῳ;....

Ὁ Παλαμάς κάνει μίᾳ καίρια διάκριση μεταξύ « θεοσεβείας », δηλαδὴ πίστεως, καὶ « πολιτείας », δηλαδὴ, συμπεριφορᾶς, (ἀπαραίτητη στὶς δια-θρησκευτικὲς σχέσεις καὶ στον δια-θρησκευτικὸν διάλογο) καὶ, ἐνῶ χαρακτηρίζει τοὺς Τούρκους ὡς « βαρβάρων βαρβάρους » καὶ « κακόφρονες », « δυσσεβῆς καὶ θεομισῆς καὶ παμμίαιρον γένος », διατεινόμενον ὅτι ἐπικρατοῦν ἐπὶ των Ρωμαίων λόγω τῆς θρησκείας τοὺς, καλεῖ τοὺς Θεσσαλονικεῖς νὰ μιμηθοῦν τοὺς Τούρκους ὡς προς τὴν « θεοσεβείαν »! Ὁ Παλαμάς ἐμφανίζεται δυσαρεστημένος ἀπὸ τὴν συμπεριφορὰ του ποιμνίου του τὴν ὁποῖα περιγράφει ὡς ἔλλειψη σωφροσύνης, μετὰ μανίας ἀμετανοησία, προαγωγή στὴν ἀκολασία, μέθη, γαστριμαργία, ἀγάπη προς τὴν ἀδικία, ἔλλειψη μακροθυμίας καὶ γενικὰ μὴ ἐπιδίωξη τῆς θείας ἀλλὰ τῆς « ἀνθρωπίνης ἀρετῆς ».

Σύγχρονος του Παλαμά ἐστὶν ὁ Ἰωάννης Καντακουζηνός, ὁ πρῶν μὲγας δομέστικος, τὸν ὁποῖον μόλις ἀναφέραμε. Ἀυτὸς μετὰ τὸν θάνατο τοῦ Ἀνδρόνικου Γ' Παλαιολόγου (αὐτοεστέφθη) αυτοανακηρύχθη αυτοκράτορας πρῶτα στὴν Ἀδριανούπολη (1346) καὶ μετὰ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη (1347) ὡς Ἰωάννης Στ' Καντακουζηνός (ca.1295–1383). Στον ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον ἐναντίον τοῦ Παλαιολόγου ὁ Καντακουζηνὸς χρησιμοποίησε Ὀθωμανικὰ στρατεύματα ἀπὸ τὴν Καλλίπολη! Ὑποστηρικτὴς τοῦ Γρηγορίου Παλαμά καὶ των ἡσυχαστῶν, μετὰ τὴν παραίτησή του ἀπὸ τὸ ἀξίωμα ἐγένετο μοναχὸς τὸ 1354 ὑπὸ τὸ ὄνομα Ἰωάσαφ. Πέθανε στὸ Μυστρά τὸ 1383. Τα

απομνημονεύματά του, *Ίστορίαι* [έκδ., L. Schopen, *Historiarum Libri IV*, 3 τόμοι (Bonn, 1828–32)] αποτελούν καίρια πηγή για την περίοδο 1320–56 και πολύτιμο συμπλήρωμα του Νικηφόρου Γρηγορά. Έγραψε επίσης « Τέσσερεις Άπολογίες κατά τής αίρέσεως του Μωάμεθ », ένα μακροσκελέστατο θεολογικο-πολεμικό πόνημα κατά του Ισλάμ προς υπεράσπιση της Χριστιανικής θρησκείας, ακολουθούμενο από άλλους « Τέσσερεις Λόγους κατά Μωάμεθ » [PG 154:372–584, 154:584–692]. Οι τίτλοι φαίνεται να είναι προσθήκες αντιγραφέων ή εκδοτών των κειμένων παρά του ίδιου του Καντακουζηνού. Οι « Άπολογίες » αποτελούν ένα είδος κατήχησης προς τους Μουσουλμάνους, με ελάχιστη αναφορά στο ίδιο το Ισλάμ, και αυτή από Χριστιανικής πλευράς. Οι τίτλοι τους είναι ενδεικτικοί: η Πρώτη, « Ότι ο Χριστός Υιός Θεού έστι, και τέλειος Θεός έστι, και Θεός ών γέγονεν άνθρωπος, ως οί θεηγόροι προφήται διακελεύονται »· η Δεύτερη, « Ότι ο Υιός και Λόγος του Θεού, Θεός ών, έπ' έσχάτων τών ημερών διά τήν τών ανθρώπων σωτηρίαν έγένετο άνθρωπος, και απέθανε σταυρωθείς, και έτάφη, και ανέστη, και ανελήφθη, και ου θεότης έπαθεν, άλλ' ο άνθρωπος, και αυτός έστιν ο μέλλων κρίνειν πάσαν τήν γήν »· η Τρίτη, « Ότι μετά τήν του Κυρίου ανάληψιν οί δώδεκα μαθηταί αυτού πάσαν τήν οικουμένην έδίδαξαν τοίς θαύμασι πιστούμενοι, και περί τής άει Παρθένου Θεοτόκου, έτι τε περί τής του Χριστού έρωτήσεως, και του σταυρού και τών εικόνων » (500–32)· και η Τέταρτη, « Ότι σφαλερώς και έπιβλαβώς έδίδαξεν ο Μωάμεθ, και ότι ου κατελύθη ο παλαιός νόμος και ή Διαθήκη παρά του Χριστού, άλλά μάλλον συνέστη, και τò του νόμου άσθενές και αδύνατον άνεπλήρωσεν τò Ευαγγέλιον ». Όσον αφορά στους « Λόγους κατά Μωάμεθ », ο Καντακουζηνός επιδίδεται σε μία σύγκριση μεταξύ αυτού και του Χριστού για να καταλήξει στο ότι,

διά ταύτα πάντα τόν Χριστόν έδει προσκυνείν, και μη τῷ Μωάμεθ ακολουθεῖν ... Πώς γάρ έδει πιστευθῆναι τὰ του Θεού λόγια ανθρώπω όμοίω κατά πάντα τῷ δαίμονι;

Κατά τον Καντακουζηνό, ο Μωάμεθ ήταν άνθρωπος « έφηρμένος και άλαζών », « άνθρωποκτόνος », « άπατεών », « ύπουλος », « σύμβουλος τών άπηγορευμένων », και « άθεος ... Θεόν γάρ προσκυνεί και κηρύττει όλόσφαιρον και ψυχρότατον... Η γάρ σφαίρα είδος σώματος έστι, και ή ψύξις ποιότης σώματος »! Οι παρανοήσεις του Βαρθολομαίου και του Γεωργίου « Αμαρτωλού » συνεχίζουν να διαποτίζουν τη γραμματεία και τη στάση των Βυζαντινών κατά του Ισλάμ ήδη από τον ένατο αιώνα. Βρίσκουν μάλιστα ιδιαίτερη ανταπόκριση στην πολύπλοκη προσωπικότητα ενός μεγαλοκτηματία, λόγιου, στρατιωτικού, θεολόγου, πολιτικού ηγέτη, μοναχού, ιδεαλιστή και, κατά τον Nicol, « απρόθυμου αυτοκράτορα » ο οποίος πίστευε ότι μπορούσε να κατορθώσει τα πάντα, σε εποχή μάλιστα οικονομικής και πολιτικής εξαθλίωσης του Βυζαντινού κράτους ως αποτέλεσμα των εμφυλίων πολέμων, για τους οποίους ευθυνόταν και ο ίδιος!

Η ζωή ενός άλλου αυτοκράτορα, του Μανουήλ Β΄ Παλαιολόγου (1391–1425), χαρακτηρίζεται από μία διαρκή εναλλαγή πολιτικής μεταξύ διευκολύνσεων προς τους Τούρκους αφενός και προσπαθειών εξασφάλισης στρατιωτικής ενίσχυσης από τη Δύση για την καταπολέμησή τους αφετέρου. Το 1391, μόλις εξήντα τρία χρόνια πριν από την πτώση της βασιλεύουσας, υποχρεώθηκε να ακολουθήσει ως υποτελής τον σουλτάνο Βαγιαζίτ Α΄ σε μία εκστρατεία στην Ανατολία, ενώ από το 1399 μέχρι το 1403 ταξίδευε στην Ευρώπη αναζητώντας στρατιωτική βοήθεια για να αποσοβήσει την πτώση τής ήδη υπό πολιορκία (1394–1402) Κωνσταντινούπολης. Το 1422 υπέστη εγκεφαλικό και τρία χρόνια αργότερα πέθανε ως μοναχός υπό το όνομα Ματθαίος. Άφησε πίσω του μία αξιόλογη συγγραφική συγχομιδή από σημαντικές για το ιστορικό τους περιεχόμενο επιστολές, θεολογικά συγγράμματα, ρητορικές ασκήσεις και έναν επικήδειο λόγο στον αδελφό του Θεόδωρο.

Είκοσι-έξι συζητήσεις με κάποιον επίσημο και λόγιο Μουσουλμάνο αποτέλεσαν το υλικό ενός έργου του με τίτλο, « *Διάλογος ὃν ἐποίησατο μετὰ τινος Πέρσου, τὴν ἀξίαν Μουτερίζη, ἐν Ἀγκύρᾳ τῆς Γαλατίας* ». Πρόκειται περί δύο κύκλων ζωντανών συζητήσεων του με τον λόγιο Μουσουλμάνο, τις οποίες κατέγραψε στο διάστημα 1392–93 μετά την επιστροφή του στην πρωτεύουσα για τον « Πολυπόθητον αὐτοῦ ἀδελφὸν πανευτυχέστατον δεσπότην Πορφυρογέννητον, Θεόδωρον τὸν Παλαιολόγον » [ἐκδ., E. Trapp, *Manuel II Palaiologos. Dialoge mit einem "Perser"* (Vienna, 1966)]. Ως εκ προοιμίου, ο Μανουήλ χαρακτηρίζει την προσπάθειά του να διδάξει κανείς αυτούς οι οποίοι « *ἐμμένουσι ταῖς πρόσθεν ἐννοίαις καὶ μετὰ τὸ ταύτας ἐλεγχῆναι ψευδεῖς* », ως « *λίαν μάταιον* » ἔργο. Αναγνωρίζει όμως στον υπερήλικα λόγιο συνομιλητή του πολλαπλά προτερήματα, ως ἄνθρωπο « *φιλήκοο* », ευγνώμονα, στον οποίον δεν ἄρεσαν οι ἐρίδες, τον οποίον αν και δεν μπορούσε κανείς να πείσει εντούτοις αὐτὸς ομολογούσε την ἀλήθεια των λεγομένων και ἔδινε απαντήσεις σε ὅσα ο συνομιλητής του τον ρωτούσε· επίσης φιλομαθῆ, ο οποίος ὁμως ὅτι θαύμαζε « *τούτοις συντίθεσθαι οὐκ ἡνεύχετο* ». Ο Μουτερίζης εμφανίζεται ως ιδεώδης συνομιλητής και ἀπὸ τα ἴδια του τα λόγια. Οι συζητήσεις διεξήχθησαν σε περίοδο χειμῶνα, δίπλα σε τζάκι, « *πόρρω που νυκτῶν πολλάκις* », παρόντων διερμηνέων και των δύο υιῶν του Μουτερίζη, σε ατμόσφαιρα αμοιβαίου σεβασμοῦ και φιλοφρονήσεων. Η πρώτη συνομιλία κινεῖται σε πλατιά, φιλοσοφικά πλαίσια περί Γραφῶν, προφητῶν, ψυχῆς, θανάτου και ἀνάστασης νεκρῶν. Η δεύτερη καταπιάνεται με θέματα ἀγγέλων, ουρανοῦ και γῆς, για τον Μωϋσῆ, τον Μωάμεθ, τους προφῆτες, περί κρίσεως και παραδείσου. Κάθε ἄλλο παρὰ πολεμικοὶ μπορούν να χαρακτηριστοῦν αὐτοὶ οἱ διάλογοι, ἔστω και αν ο σύγχρονός μας Πάπας Βενέδικτος ΙΣΤ΄ [βλ. την πολυσυζητημένη διάλεξή του στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Regensburg (12 Σεπτ. 2006)] θέλησε ἀπὸ ὅλο αὐτὸ το εκπληκτικὸ σενάριο 26 διαλόγων του Μανουήλ με τον « *Πέρση* », ἢ ἀκόμη και ἀπὸ ὅλον τον Ἑβδομο διάλογο, να ἀποκόψει ἀπὸ τα συμφραζόμενα μία και μόνον ἀναφορά για να τονίσει ὅτι το Ισλάμ εἶναι θρησκεία του ξίφους! Κάτι τέτοιο παραποιεῖ το περιεχόμενο και το κλίμα του Βυζαντινο-Ισλαμικοῦ διαλόγου, του τελευταίου πριν ἀπὸ την

πτώσει! Η εν λόγω αναφορά σχετίζεται με το ρητορικό ερώτημα του Μανουήλ προς τον Μουτερίζη:

Δείξον γάρ εἴ τι καινὸν ἐκείνω [Μωϋσῆ] νενομοθέτηται [ὑπὸ τοῦ Μωάμεθ]· ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν ἔχοις εἰ μὴ χειρόν τι καὶ ἀπανθρωπότατον, οἷον δὴ ποιεῖν νομοθετῶν διὰ ξίφους χωρεῖν τὴν ἣν αὐτὸς ἐκήρυττε πίστιν....

Ο Μανουήλ δικαιολογημένα εκφράζει την πεποίθηση ότι « *Ἐπειθ' ἡ πίστις ψυχῆς οὐ σώματός ἐστι καρπός ... δεῖ γλώττης ἀγαθῆς καὶ διανοίας ὀρθῆς τῷ πρὸς τὴν πίστιν ἐνάγοντι, οὐ βίας, οὐκ ἀπειλῆς, οὐ δάκνοντός τινος ἢ φρικώδους* » [βλ. Trapp, σ. 144 (3c:11–14)] – αρχή την οποία δέχεται και το Ισλάμ, η οποία όμως δεν συνδέεται με τον « *ιερό πόλεμο* » (*jihād*). Μολονότι ο Πάπας αναγνώρισε στη διάλεξή του ότι η αναφορά αυτή είναι « *μάλλον περιθωριακή στον ὅλο διάλογο* » και την βλέπει ως « *ενδιαφέρουσα στο πλαίσιο του θέματος 'πίστη και λογική'* », εντούτοις το ότι θέλησε να σταθεί επιλεκτικά και να υπογραμμίσει μόνον αυτή συνιστά σοβαρό ακαδημαϊκό ολίσθημα εκ μέρους ενός διανοούμενου ποντίφικα. Ο διάλογος του Μανουήλ με τον « *Πέρση* » αποκτά ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον αν αναλογιστεί κανείς ότι διαμείφθηκε στη δύση του δέκατου τετάρτου αιώνα και τόσο κοντά στη πτώση του Βυζαντίου!

Στις ελάχιστες δεκαετίες του για τη Βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία, ο 15<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας αποτελεί περίοδο ενός κράτους εξουθενωμένου από πλευράς στρατιωτικής, πολιτικής και οικονομικής, ὅχι ὅμως εξασθενημένου από πλευράς αντι-Ισλαμικής πολεμικής. Η αίσθηση ότι το Ισλάμ και οι Τούρκοι συνιστούσαν την τιμωρό απάντηση του Θεού στη χλιαρή πίστη και στη άνομη συμπεριφορά των Βυζαντινών ήταν διάχυτη. Ἐτσι, ο κύκλος της ιστορίας των σχέσεων Ανατολικού Χριστιανισμού και Ισλάμ έκλεινε στο ίδιο σημείο απ' ὅπου αυτός είχε αρχίσει: ὅτι, μολονότι (ἢ επειδή) εἴμαστε ο λαός του Θεού και κατέχουμε την ἀλήθεια, τιμωρούμαστε για την απιστία και τις αμαρτίες μας! Το αίσθημα αυτό εξέφρασαν, κατά τον ένα ἢ τον ἄλλον τρόπο, ὅλοι σχεδόν οι συγγραφείς των λίγων τελευταίων δεκαετιῶν της αυτοκρατορίας, και για το δικό του λόγο ο καθένας. Αναφέρουμε ενδεικτικά τέσσερα ονόματα:

Λίγες μόνο δεκαετίες πριν την πτώση ζει και δρα ο Ιωσήφ Βρυέννιος (ca. 1350–ca. 1431/38), μοναχός, πρεσβευτής, ιεροκήρυκας της αυλῆς, δάσκαλος των Ελληνικῶν και Λατινικῶν, απεσταλμένος του Πατριάρχη σε μία σύνθετη ποιμαντική αποστολή στη Βενετοκρατούμενη Κρήτη (1382/83–1402/3), και γόνιμος συγγραφέας. Μεταξύ αυτῶν και η « *Μετὰ τινος Ἰσμαηλίτου διάλεξις* » [Α. Ἀργυρίου « *Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Βρυεννίου μετὰ τινος Ἰσμαηλίτου διάλεξις* », *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 35 (1966/7) 141–95]. Εἶναι ο σθεναρός αντίπαλος του ανθενωτικῶν κινήματος με την Καθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία και ο ἔνθερος υποστηρικτῆς της Ορθοδοξίας. Εκπληκτικὴ εἶναι η τόλμη με την οποίαν ο Βρυέννιος περιγράφει την ηθικὴ διαφθορά του Βυζαντίου στους χρόνους του σ' ἓνα σύντομο κείμενο-καταπέλτη με τίτλο, « *Τινές αἰτίαι τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς λυπηρῶν* » [ἐκδ., L. Oeconomus, "L'état intellectuel et moral des

Byzantins vers le milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après une page de Joseph Bryennios", *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, I (Paris, 1930), 227–28]. Ενοχλημένος από την ηθική διαφθορά της Εκκλησίας στους χρόνους του, ο Βρυέννιος γράφει χαρακτηριστικά στον "Περί τῆς Ὑπερθέου" Λόγο του: "διέφθαρται τὰ τῆς Βασιλείας ... Ἐνθεν Ἀγαρηνοὶ διώκουσιν ἡμᾶς, ἐκεῖθεν Σκῦθαι λυμαίνονται". Μολονότι χαρακτηρίζει τους Αγαρηνούς ως "μιαρὸν ἔθνος καὶ ἄθεον", επαινεί την ανεκτικότητα του Ισλάμ καθώς και τις αρετές πολλῶν Μουσουλμάνων, ὅπως προηγουμένως ο Παλαμάς,. Για τον Βρυέννιο, η κατάπτωση του Βυζαντίου αποτελεί θεία τιμωρία για τις αμαρτίες του κράτους και της Εκκλησίας των Βυζαντινῶν.

Ένας δεύτερος, ο αυλικός, διπλωμάτης και ιστορικός Γεώργιος Σφραντζής (1401–77/8) γράφει το δικό του *Χρονικό Minus*, το οποίο καλύπτει την περίοδο 1413–77 [έκδ. V. Grecu, *Georgios Sphrantzes, Memorii 1401–1477* (București, 1966)], ως αυτόπτης μάρτυρας των γεγονότων της πτώσης. Φαίνεται να είχε εμπειριστατωμένη εικόνα της θρησκείας των κατακτητῶν, με ὅλες τις παρανοήσεις και των πιο ακραίων αντιρρητικῶν τῆς μέχρι τότε Βυζαντινῆς ἀντι-Ισλαμικῆς γραμματείας, ἀν καὶ δὲν τις επαναλαμβάνει στο *Χρονικό* του. Το ὄνομά του ὅμως (γί' αὐτό καὶ « ψευδο-Σφραντζής ») ἔδωσε τὴν ευκαιρία συγγραφῆς ἐνὸς ἐκτενεστέρου *Χρονικοῦ*, τοῦ *Maius*, το ὁποῖον καλύπτει τὴν περίοδο 1258–1481 [PG 156:637–1022]. Εἶναι στο Τέταρτο Βιβλίον αὐτοῦ τοῦ *Χρονικοῦ Maius* ὅπου ἡ χρονογραφία ἐκτρέπεται σὲ μίαν ἐκτενῆ πολεμικὴν κατὰ τοῦ Ισλάμ καὶ κυρίως κατὰ τοῦ Μωάμεθ. Ἐδῶ, ἀντιγράφονται ὁ Βαρθολομαῖος, ὁ Γεώργιος « Ἀμαρτωλός », ὁ Ἰωάννης Καντακουζηνός καὶ ἄλλοι, σὲ μίαν σειράν συγκρίσεων μεταξύ Μωάμεθ (« ἀνθρωποκτόνος », « ἀπατεῶν », βυθισμένος εἰς τὰς « ἡδονάς », « ψεύστης », « ὑπουργός », « σύμβουλος τῶν ἀπηγορευμένων », « ἐπὶ ἡμετέροις καὶ ἀλαζών », « ἄθεος » διότι « Θεὸν προσκυνεῖ καὶ κηρύττει δόλοσφαιρον καὶ ψυχρότατον ... ἢ γὰρ σφαῖρα εἶδος σώματος ἐστὶ καὶ ἢ ψῆξις ποιότητος σώματος ») καὶ διαβόλου. Στὴ σύγκριση αὐτὴ υπερτερεῖ, βέβαια, ὁ Μωάμεθ! Ἡ πολεμικὴ γραμματεία τοῦ παρελθόντος πρόσφερε εὐκολὴν, καὶ ἐπιτακτικὴν, θεώρησιν τοῦ Ισλάμ καὶ τοῦ Μωάμεθ γιὰ τὴν κατὰ τὴν πτῶσιν καὶ ἀμέσως μετ' αὐτὴν ψυχολογικὴν κατὰστασιν τῶν Βυζαντινῶν, ἀνάμεικτὴ μετὰ τὴν βεβαιότητα τοῦ ψευδο-Σφραντζῆ ὅτι τὸ τέλος τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν « ἤξει ἐν τῷ προσήκοντι καὶ ὠρισμένῳ καιρῷ ».

Ὁ ἄλλος ιστορικός τῆς πτῶσης, Ἰωάννης Δούκας (ca.1400–62/70) [έκδ., V. Grecu, *Ducas Istorica Turco-Bizantină (1341–1462)* (București, 1958)], θεωρεῖ τὴν κατακτήσεις τῶν Τούρκων ὡς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν τῶν Βυζαντινῶν μολονότι, κατ' αὐτόν, καὶ ἡ τύχη παιζεῖ μὲν μεγάλο ρόλον στὴν ἐξέλιξιν ιστορικῶν γεγονότων! Γιὰ τὸν Δούκα ὁ μὲν Μουράτ (1421–51) εἶναι « πρόδρομος τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ », οἱ δὲ Τούρκοι « ἔθνος ... ὡς οὐκ ἄλλο, φιλάρπαγον καὶ φιλάδικον », οἱ ὁποῖοι ἐπέδραμαν κατὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ « ὡς πρόβατα τούτους ἐζώγων, ἀρρήτοις Θεοῦ κρίμασι ... ἔνεκα πλήθους ἀμαρτιῶν τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους ». Ὁ Δούκας, ὅπως καὶ ὁ Σφραντζής, ἐκφράζει τὴν ἐλπίδα ὅτι « τὸ τέλος τῆς τυραννίδος τῶν Ὀτμάνων ἔσται ὁμοῦ φθάσαν σὺν τῷ τέλει τῆς βασιλείας τῶν Παλαιολόγων ». Ἡ ἐλπίδα αὐτὴ ἐκπεφρασμένη « παρὰ τινῶν γερόντων

*τιμίων ἀνδρῶν*», αποτέλεσε για τον Δούκα τον λόγο για τον οποίον, αν και « οὐκ ἦν πρέπον χρονολογεῖν νίκας καὶ ἀδραγαθήματα τυράννου δυσσεβοῦς καὶ ἐχθροῦ ἀσπόνδου καὶ ὀλετήρου τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν », τον ὤθησε να γράψει το θλιβερό αυτό χρονικό της ἄλωσης.

Τέλος, ο Πατριάρχης της πτώσης, Γεννάδιος Β' Σχολάριος (1454–56, 1463, 1464–65), ο ανθενωτικός αλλά και συμβιβαστικός δάσκαλος της λογικής και της φυσικής, αιχμάλωτος των Τούρκων, συνέγραψε στην Καραμανλική γλώσσα (Τουρκικά με Ελληνικούς χαρακτήρες) μία *Ὁμολογία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεως* για τον Μωάμεθ τον Κατακτητή, το πρώτο κείμενο στην Καραμανλική. Ερμήνευσε επίσης ένα χρησμό σχετιζόμενο με το Ισλάμ [C.J.G. Turner, « An oracular interpretation attributed to Gennadius Scholarius » *Ἑλληνικά* 21 (1968), 40–47]. Ενώ για το Δούκα Χριστιανισμός και Ισλάμ συνιστοῦν δύο ισοδύναμες θρησκείες στην εποχή του, για τον Γεννάδιο οι δύο αυτές είναι συγκρουόμενες. Η θεωρία της « σύγκρουσης των πολιτισμῶν » δεν αποτελεί εφεύρεση του αιώνα μας!

Η μακρά ιστορία των Βυζαντινο-Ισλαμικῶν σχέσεων και της αντι-Ισλαμικῆς γραμματείας διαγράφει ένα ευρύ φάσμα προσώπων, κειμένων, ὕφους, κινήτρων, διαθέσεων, θρησκευτικῆς ἠθους και χαρακτήρα· ένα φάσμα ἐξαιρετικά πλατὺ το οποίον εὐλόγα περιλαμβάνει τη νηφαλιότητα και την παράκρουση, ὅπως και κάθε ἀπόχρωση μεταξύ των δύο. Και αυτό διότι η ιστορία των Βυζαντινο-Ισλαμικῶν σχέσεων ἦταν πλούσια σε ἀμεσες επαφές, σε προσωπικές ἐμπειρίες και ἐντυπώσεις και, επομένως, σε πολυσχιδὴ συγκομιδὴ. Οι Βυζαντινοὶ ἤλθαν σε υπαρξιακὴ ἐπαφὴ με το Ισλάμ. Διαλέχθηκαν με αυτό· τους ἀπασχόλησε, τους προκάλεσε και ἔτσι ἀπέκτησαν, ο καθένας με το δικό του τρόπο, αἴσθηση αὐτοῦ· ἀλλιῶς δεν θα εἶχαμε αὐτὴν την πολυμέρεια και ποικιλία ἀναπόκρισης. Για μερικούς η συνάντηση αὐτὴ προκάλεσε ἐνδοστρέφεια, ἢ και ευκαιρία πνευματικῆς ἀνάνηψης. Σε ἄλλους προκάλεσε ἀμφιβολία, προκατάληψη, ὀργή, μίσος, φόβο, ἀπέχθεια, ἢ αἴσθηση « θεοσέβειας ». Ἐνα πράγμα πάντως δεν μπορεῖ να πει κανεὶς γι' αὐτὴ τη μακρὰ παράδοση και ἐμπειρία: ὅτι εἶναι πληκτικὴ, ἢ ἀνιαρὴ!

Ἐνα δεῦτερο πράγμα που μπορεῖ να πει κανεὶς γι' αὐτὴν την παράδοση με κάποια βεβαιότητα εἶναι ὅτι ὅσοι Βυζαντινοὶ ἀρκέστηκαν στην προκατάληψη και στην ἀκρισία δεν ἀφησαν πίσω τους παρά δείγματα υπεροψίας, σκληρότητας και στενοκαρδίας· ἴσως δε και μιας ἐπίπλαστης μεταφυσικῆς πίστεως. Ἀντίθετα ὅσοι εἶχαν, ἢ ἀπέκτησαν, κάποια μετὰ λόγου γνώση του Ισλάμ, ἔκαναν νηφάλεις παρατηρήσεις και τομές, και κληροδότησαν δημιουργικὲς ἀρχές και προϋποθέσεις διαλόγου με ἐπικεντρο τον ἄνθρωπο, κατανόησης του « ἄλλου », και συνυπαρξῆς με το « διαφορετικὸ »!



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## The Christological Morphology of the Doctrine of the Qurʾān

The initial title of my essay “The meaning of the “Word [λόγος-*kalima*] of God” in Christianity and in Islam” would have led me to an even lengthier discussion exploring historical, theological, and hermeneutical aspects of the topic, aspects which are still under refinement in both religious communities.

With this new title I am revealing *a priori* the focus and the conclusion of my essay by stating that while in Christianity the “Word of God” is Christ himself, in Islam it is the Qurʾān; thus maintaining that any serious dialogue between the two religions must not begin by comparing each other’s book or scriptures, but rather the common notion “Word of God” to which both religions adhere, but on which they have a different experience and which they see under a different manifestation. The idea is not novel. It has been suggested without much elaboration by two prominent scholars, Wilfred Cantwell Smith<sup>1</sup> a Christian, and by Hossein Nasr,<sup>2</sup> a Muslim. I have embraced this suggestion not only because I have simply trusted the sharpness of scholarship of the former, and the balanced and sensitive knowledge of the latter, but also because I continuously find meaning in this juxtaposition as I am studying Christianity and Islam as historical-theological religious traditions, and as existential experiences and ways of life. This essay, then, is an attempt at putting some flesh into this imaginative and truthful proposition.<sup>3</sup>

In studying other religions one may choose to take a high road and talk about general principles of interreligious dialogue or religious pluralism. Or one may take expressions as they appear to be and choose to compare their externals. More often than not, however, one may experience frustrations or end up with gross misunderstandings and possibly with a totally negative attitude toward another religion. What is worse is that one may find out that he has gone through a wasteful experience that has only impoverished his own intellectual and spiritual capabilities making him single-minded and intellectually

1 W.C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New York, 1957), pp. 25–26.

2 Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Boston, 1975), p. 43.

3 The same authors have suggested that as a consequence of the affinity between Christ and the Qurʾān, a better now phenomenological affinity exists between Mary and Muhammad as well as the gospels and the Hadith, as the means by which the Word became manifested in the first instance, and as the body containing the “Apostolic” tradition in the second instance.

narrower than before. The long controversy comparing the Bible to the Qur'ān has resulted not only in an impasse but also in the cultivation of misguided beliefs about each other which have developed into doctrinal or formal theses. Such a thesis is, for example, that Scriptures of the monotheists prior to Islam have been corrupted (the doctrine of the *tahrif*), or on the Christian side that the Qur'ān is the result of Muhammad's dream and reverie!

A third alternative may be that one may choose to study religious phenomena on their own terms and attempt to discover their essential dynamics and meaning for the faithful of a particular religious tradition. The history of Muslim-Christian relations has been largely one of dialectics; an effort to *prove* that the one religion is false compared to the other. In this effort the first and foremost source that has been used is each other's Scripture. One is tempted, however, to make at this point two general observations as a way of questioning the validity of this method of argument:

- a) that the history of Muslim-Christian relations itself has shown that "dialogues" made on the basis of comparing each other's Scriptures have proven futile and led nowhere except to open confrontation and despair;
- b) that the history of Christianity has also shown that the Bible as the word of God, while aiming at providing a common source and reference, has not prevailed from creating divergence, denominationalism or individualism on the basis of the text of the Bible itself.

It seems that both Muslims and Christians have fallen into the common man-made trap of losing sight of the essential because of the externals; thus choosing to talk to each other in parallel lines without stopping to identify and evaluate their real converging lines.

An early and possible lonely observer of *essential* affinities between Islam and Christianity is John of Damascus, albeit the fact that he refuted Islam strongly. But at least he was able to discern the issues and treat them in their context. He discerned the "Word of God" as a notion in Islam and grasped the opportunity to capitalize on it. He writes:

Again we say to them: "Since you say that Christ is Word and Spirit of God, how do you scold us as *Associators*? For the Word and the Spirit is each inseparable from the one in whom this has the origin; if, therefore, the Word of God is obvious that he is God as well. If, on the other hand, this is outside of God, then God, according to you, is without word and without spirit. Thus, in trying to avoid ascribing associates to God you have mutilated Him. For it would be better if you had said that he has an associate than to mutilate him and present him as if he were a stone, or

wood, or any of the inanimate objects. Therefore, in accusing us falsely you call us *Associators*; but we call you *Mutilators* (κόπτας) of God.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously John of Damascus had not recognized that it was the Qur'ān that the Muslims believed to be the Word of God in the Christian sense. This shows that the theology about the Qur'ān had not yet been formulated by the time of John of Damascus (d.ca 745). Perhaps John's articulate objection against the notion of a God without Word and Spirit contributed to the Muslim theology on the attributes of God. Although John of Damascus ridiculed the Qur'ān, he never did so as being the Word of God, but as a *scriptural* man-made source of the Islamic doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

Scriptures are invoked in interreligious dialogues to refute each other's faith because Scriptures have been claimed to be "the Word of God"; unique, infallible, and containing the eternal truth. But the expression "Word of God" is a statement of faith which stems, to some degree, from one's own scriptures. The notion "Word of God" is not an objective criterion. It is, therefore, inconsistent to use Scriptures as an objective criterion since acceptance and understanding of this body of scripture requires a particular theological commitment, sensitivity and faith. Thence the painstaking effort of controversialists to twist and rationalize their Scriptures and distort the Scripture of the other in order to make it fit each particular case; to make, that is, the "Word of God" something "black and white", provable on the basis of a written text. Biblicism, as such, is as alien and destructive to the essence of Christianity as it is to the essence of Islam.

The notion "Word of God" is not a strange or peripheral idea in Christianity or in Islam. As a matter of fact, in a more primitive form as "heavenly decrees", it has a broad Semitic, Babylonian, ancient Israelite basis with broader meaning and implications than a Book or Scripture. It is not only the way of man, but also the course of the world as the *replica* of what had been recorded long before in heavenly books or on heavenly tablets.<sup>6</sup> It is the heavenly writ comprised of two things, the course of the world and divine revelation. Judaism had given the Torah a place among the pre-existent entities. In Christianity the idea of pre-existence and eternity had been attributed to the *Logos*, the Word of God, who has been with God from the beginning. Orthodox Islam in general

4 P. Bonifatius, Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. IV (Berlin, 1981), pp. 63-4; PG 94: 768CD.

5 For more on John of Damascus and the Islamic teaching of the Word of God see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam "The Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 82-84.

6 Cf. A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed. Its Genesis and Historical Development*, (London, 1965), p. 54.

agreed with such conceptions. It took over the idea of the divine decree as it took also the idea of pre-existent Book, although adherents to the absolute simplicity or unity (*tawhid*) of God, particularly the Mu‘tazilites, reserved eternity for Allah alone, and rejected the notion in reference to any other entity.<sup>7</sup>

The notion “Word of God” is at the heart of monotheistic theology and the source of its articulation. It touches upon the crucial issue of the mode of existence of God and the manifestations of His existence or His revelation, or more specifically the means of God’s revelation. Revelation is an essential component of monotheistic theology as it is the attempt to explain on the one hand the transcendent Being of God and on the other hand His relationship with the finite and material creation, and particularly with mankind. The question of the unknowability of God on the one hand and his immanence with the world on the other is one that has exercised the monotheistic minds. In both traditions, Christianity and Islam, the absolute simplicity of God is offended by the human effort to make Him accessible and tangible. Both traditions have experimented with the idea of names or attributes of God. Both have ascribed a special emphasis on them. On their philosophical side both traditions have adopted a *theologia negativa*.<sup>8</sup> But they have also adopted the idea that God has reason and speech (*Logos*) and that speaking is one of God’s essential and uncreated that is, eternal qualities. Where they have parted directions is on the question of *how* this Logos of God is manifested. For Christianity the Logos has manifested itself in human form – or rather in the unique being of God-man, and in Islam in the Book, the Qur’ān, which is the reflection of and consubstantial to the Archetype or the Heavenly Preserved Tablet.

## 1 On Christian and Islamic Biblicism

From the point of view of the Christian tradition I would put forth a few simple suggestions which at least seem to question the proposition that the Scriptures or the Bible is the “Word of God”, the way of God’s revelation, let alone His cosmic manifestation:

- a) The Canon of the New Testament took some six centuries to reach its present form. And yet God’s revelation was not believed by the Christian community to be less infallible and authentic until the final formation of the Bible. As a matter of fact, it was the self-understanding of the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Dionysus the Areopagite *On the divine names*; or John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, p. 6, col.86o.

- Christian body, the Church, as the “mystical body of Christ” that gave authority to the Bible by the very process of canonization.
- b) The particular books of the New Testament are explicitly called by their own authors “gospels” that is *kerygma* about the event of Christ; and this *kerygma* not in any absolute sense but “according to” Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The book of Acts, the Epistles and even the Apocalypse are writings in the same spirit of the gospel, expressive of the life and of the ideals of the earliest Christian community. One can safely suggest that at best the New Testament speaks of the ethos and faith of the earliest Christians, as the Hadith speaks of the faith of early Islam. It is in this spirit of *kerygma* that the word “word” (*logos*) appears in the New Testament as “the word of the Lord”, the word of Christ”, “my [Jesus’] word”, “the word of truth”, “the word of salvation”, “the word of grace”, “the word of the gospel”, “the word of the kingdom”, “the word of the cross”, or “the word in the law”. But none of these is hypostasized as the actual “Word of God”.
- c) There is no early Christian credal statement that proclaims *faith* in the Bible. Knowing also that the earliest creeds are actually compilations of baptismal creeds, one can assume that faith in the Bible as such, is not a prerequisite for becoming a Christian. Scriptures in themselves are not an article of faith, at least in early Christianity. The expression “according to the Scriptures is not in the Apostles’ Creed but it is found in the later Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed not as an article of faith but as a reaffirmation of the belief in the Resurrection of Christ.<sup>9</sup>
- d) It is something well-known that Christ left nothing in writing either by his own hand or as a recital to be copied and preserved; nor did he imply that something written should be the cornerstone of faith in him. What he applauded as the unshakable foundation of the Christian experience was the conviction articulated in what could be considered the earliest Christian creed, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”.<sup>10</sup> Not unrelated to this point is the reminder that the name “Christian” – initially a derogatory designation of the faithful by their opponents – meant to the earliest Christians an “imitator of Christ”, a “Christ-like person”.<sup>11</sup>

9 “... and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures”.

10 Greek Eastern and Latin Western mediaeval Christendom clashed over the issue whether in Christianity authority lies in this statement of faith itself, or with that of the disciple [Peter] who made this statement.

11 Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Magnesians* 4:1; *Romans* 2:1, 3:2; *Smyrnaeans* 4:2, 11:1; *Polycarp*, 7:3.

- e) The Apostolic tradition does not acknowledge any Bible or written word of God as its basis but only the very *event* of Christ, manifested as a living experience:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life ... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.<sup>12</sup>

Here the *word* is hypostasized in the person of the risen Christ, “the word of life”, “the Son of the Father”.

The Bible itself is a proclamation, a means and an expression of transmitting (*παράδοσις*); his living experience, not a substitute for that which is transmitted.<sup>13</sup> The New Testament references to Bible (*Βίβλος*) or Scripture (*Γραφή*) or to the verb “to write” (*γράφειν*) do not ascribe any authority to the fact that something has been written but to the fact that it has been transmitted through the Law even in writing.<sup>14</sup> However in Islam it is the event itself of the Word of God being spoken and recited – and subsequently committed to writing – that constitutes God’s own Word and Revelation; and Revelation in both Christianity and Islam are intrinsically related to salvation.

- f) The hypostasized Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ is an earliest part of the Christian faith as the eloquent introduction of the fourth gospel testifies.<sup>15</sup> There the Word of God is uncreated, of the same substance with God the Father, the means of creation, God’s own revelation<sup>16</sup> who “became flesh and dwelt among us”. There is no ambiguity in this statement. In the book of Apocalypse the case is even more dramatically stated: “He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God”.<sup>17</sup>

To these theses one should contrast the Muslim positions regarding the Qur’an.

- a) God reveals Himself in Scriptures through prophets who *recite* what they receive.
- b) Belief in Scriptures *is* one of the principles of faith.

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 1:1–4.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also the introduction of the Gospel according to Luke.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Luk. 2:23; 10:26; Rom 1:17.

<sup>15</sup> John 1:1–18.

<sup>16</sup> “The light shines in the darkness ...”; “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known”.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. 19:13.



- c) The Qur'ān is believed to be the *actual* word of God, uncreated; the final stage of God's revelation.
- d) The canon of the Qur'ān took only a few years to be composed, which *is* the foundation of Muslim faith ("principles of faith") and practice ("pillars") of Islam.
- e) Recital of the Qur'ān in its original Arabic language and in the context of the ritual prayer (*salat*) is the means of man's existential communion with God.
- f) In spite of its form as a book, the Qur'ān defies all rational expectations and similarities of a book of human reasoning and wisdom (e.g. the unsystematic and non-chronological order of the surahs; the arbitrary names of each surah; the mysterious letters; the forcefulness and inimitable character of the Qur'ān).

We will deal with these points in more detail later on.

## 2 The Logos Theology

The Logos-Theology in Christianity and its crucial influence in the formulation of the Trinitarian and the Christological theology are subjects well-known that need no repetition here.<sup>18</sup>

The uniqueness of the theology of the Christian tradition is to be found in its perception of God as a *personal* Being – "personal" meaning a unique way by which God reveals Himself. The notion of the personal character of God has to do with the notion of the knowability of the unknown character of God.<sup>19</sup> The *personal* character of God, however, is not a purely Christian "invention" *ex nihilo*. Its roots are to be found in the Palestinian Judaism towards the new era, with its rising interests in the divine "hypostases" expressed in the personification of Wisdom and in the assignment to it of creative functions.<sup>20</sup>

In later Judaism it is such "figures" as *Wisdom* to whom it is implied that God said "Let us make man in our own image"; or that they are God's "*glory*" or "*Presence*" (*Shehinah*); or God's *Word* and *Spirit* is sometimes spoken of as God's agent in creation.<sup>21</sup> The question whether these "figures" were per-

18 For an easy review of these questions see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (N. York, 1958, 1960) and Arthur C. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. I (New York, 1932, 1960).

19 Cf. John of Damascus *Accurate Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 8.1.8 (Kotter, pp. 18:2–19:27).

20 Job 28:12 ff; Prov. 8:22; Wis. 7:2 ff; Eccl. 24:1ff. Cf. Kelly, 18.

21 Judith 16:14; 2 Bar. 21:4.

sonified abstractions, paraphrases for God Himself, or whether they had an independent subsistence was not specifically raised.<sup>22</sup>

Alexandrian or Hellenistic Judaism influenced by Hellenistic philosophy set itself to interpret Jewish theology and make it compatible to reason and philosophical requirements. The main proponent of Alexandrian Judaism is the Hellenized but “inflexible Jew in faith and practice”<sup>23</sup> Philo (30 BC–ca. AD45) who accepted the Platonic distinction between the ideal or intelligible, and the material worlds, BUT who sought to show that the former is (partially?) accessible through the latter because of God’s initiative and will (revelation). Thence his twofold thought: the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and the Logos theology. Philo “compares the literal sense of Scripture to the shadow which the body casts, finding its authentic, profounder truth in the spiritual meaning which it symbolizes”.<sup>24</sup> The Ash‘arites who articulated the orthodox Muslim theology, after being challenged by Mu‘tazilite theology, made a distinction between the externals of the Qur‘ān that included anthropomorphism and the utterance of the Qur‘ān (*lafz*) and the *inherent* speech (*kalima*) of God, which is uncreated. They, like Philo and before him the Alexandrian Jew Aristobulus, tried to explain away the anthropomorphic expressions in the Scriptures.

On this score both Philo and the Ash‘arites insisted on the particular rereading of the scriptures. Philo, however, stressed the spiritual character of the letter of the Law which is “a divinely authorized veil covering a whole complex of Greek philosophical ideas”.<sup>25</sup> Where Philo and the Ash‘arites depart roads is when Philo starts talking about the *uncreated* Logos!

Guided by the Middle Platonists, Philo taught that God is utterly transcendent, pure being (*τὸ ὄντως ὄν*), absolutely simple and self-sufficing, and can be described as “without quality” (*ἄποιος*). But that leaves unanswered the question of God’s relation to the world which both Judaism and Platonism do not want to neglect. The world is a matter of divine formation and governance for both. The imposition of intermediary divine beings between the Supreme God and the material order is unsatisfactory to Philo. Nothing should interfere with the uniqueness of the God revealed in Scripture. Thence the *Logos*, the intermediary “power” (*δύναμις*) – “the eldest and most akin to God of the things that have come into existence”. Philo’s ambiguous teaching of the Logos allows the following characteristics:

- a) He is God’s agent in creation; and
- b) The means by which the mind apprehends God.

22 Kelly, p. 18.

23 Kelly, p. 19.

24 Kelly, p. 20.

25 Kelly, p. 20.

Both ideas remind us of the Stoic Logos. The ideas that God created the world by His word (*λόγος*) and that He revealed Himself to the prophets by His word are also Biblical. The Wisdom theology also is congenial to Logos theology: Wisdom was created first and God used her to create the world. Was the Logos for Philo a *personal* being? This is still an open question. What is important is that Philo, like the Middle Platonists, considered the World to be the expression of the mind of the one God! As in man there is a rational thought in the mind (*ἐνδιάθετος λόγος*) as well as a thought uttered as word (*προφορικὸς λόγος*), so there is the *Logos*, or the mind of God, projected into formless unreal matter making it into a real and rational universe. The Ash'arite Logos theology is clearly a Middle Platonic philosophy, amplified by the monotheist Philo. Unlike Plato, who considered matter as pre-existent and eternal, Justin considered that God used His Logos, or Word, as an instrument for creating the cosmos.

It was the Apologists who tried first to provide an intellectually satisfying explanation of the relation of Christ to God the Father. They were the ones who taught that being pre-existent, Christ is the Father's mind or thought and, being manifested in creation and revelation, he is God's mind, exploration or expression. Among the Apostolic Fathers Ignatius of Antioch has spoken eloquently of the Word of God derived from the unfathomable silence that is the unknowability of God. An echo of this teaching we find in Psalms 33:6, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made". The characteristic of Logos, according to the Apologists and the earliest Christian theologians is that he is God's offspring (*γέννημα*), his child (*τέκνον*) and unique Son (*μονογενής*), in contrast to other things or beings which were made (*ποιήματα*) or created (*κτίσματα*).

The Logos theology became the predominant and orthodox theology of early Christianity. Through Hippolytus and others, it opposed successfully Modalism, the teaching that maintained that the distinctions in the Godhead were only transitory and not eternal and permanent persons. Orthodox theology also prevailed over Monarchianism which wanted to safeguard the Unity ("Monarchy") of the Godhead but failed to do justice to the independent subsistence of the Son. The Arian controversy presupposed the Logos theology, which was questioned neither by Arius, nor by his opponents. The difference between Arius and his opponents was that Arius denied the divinity of the Logos, because it denied his co-eternity and thus his consubstantiality with God the Father. It is amazing how parallel the questions and the arguments of Islamic theology are to those of Logos theology and Christology in Christianity: the dilemma about the anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur'ān; the relationship between the names and the essence of God; the question of the Unity (*tawhid*) of God and his revelation; the uncreated, or eternal, and created nature of the Qur'ān; the distinction between the inherent uncreated speech of God and its manifestation in created *lafz*.

Finally in both traditions the driving force behind the formation of the doctrine of the Word of God was the “practical” and existential question that Religion has set itself to answer: salvation. Revelation in Christianity and in Islam implies salvation. The Logos Theology and the Christological doctrine are the Christian answers to the question of Salvation, rather to the creation or cosmic origin.<sup>26</sup> The doctrine of the uncreated Qur’ān as the actual speech of God is the “straight path”<sup>27</sup> that leads to communion with God. The Qur’ān is also *Furqan*, or salvation. It is quite interesting that Qur’ān and *Furqan* are two interchangeable and consequential names referring to the Qur’ān itself.

### 3 The Islamic “Word of God”

Turning now our attention to Islam itself and its theology of the Qur’ān we must remember that there is a particular context within which this theology developed. Even the length of time and the order of process of the development of this particular doctrine have similarities with that of the Christological doctrine.

The development and formation of Islamic theology was the result of an evolution of political events in the Muslim community that lasted some three centuries (7th–9th centuries). It is a period of “dogmatic crisis of Islam”.<sup>28</sup> The Theology of Islam, especially early theology, is an applied one. The first theological issue was that of faith or works as *the* necessary characteristic of one being a Muslim. The question of faith or works arose at a moment of political crisis created by the assassination of ‘Uthman (644), the caliph (successor) to the Prophet of God. How does one deal with an assassin and his accomplices. Is such a person a Muslim and has he any place in the Muslim community? The question developed into a debate which one could remotely call “theological”, as to whether judgement of someone’s actions is a human or solely a divine prerogative.

The Muslim community was split on the issue: for moralists and practically-minded Muslims, abrogation of the will of God, expressedly stated in the Qur’ān, gives authority to the Muslim Community to judge human behaviour. For puritan Muslims – disinterested in or unaffected by political expediency – judgement is a quality and a prerogative of God alone, Who is “the owner of the Day of Judgement”.<sup>29</sup> This is the debate between the Kharijites, the moralists

26 McGiffert, pp. 246ff.

27 Surat al-Fatiha, v. 5.

28 Wensinck, p. 58.

29 Cf. Surat al-Fatiha, v.3: “Owner of the Day of Judgement....”

who finally broke away from the main-stream community, and the Murjiites, the “postponers” of judgement until God’s Judgement Day. The question of judgement then gave rise to a more general question regarding the attributes or qualities of God and what are they. Again the debate took the practically-applied form between two sides, one defending the absolute *power* and the other the absolute *justice* of God. This issue then gave rise to the question of the relationship between the omnipotence of God and the human responsibility for one’s own acts. In Islamic theology the question was not so much man’s freedom of will, but rather man’s own power (*qadar*) to do good or evil. These debates then gave rise to the question of the nature of the qualities of God, namely whether they are created, or expressions of His eternal being and thus uncreated. This issue then gave rise to a question which is even more immediate and tangible: Is the Qur’ān, as the Word of God, created or uncreated? The question has obviously immense practical, moral and theological implications insofar as the meaning, the interpretation and the application of the Qur’ān is concerned. Matters also of literal, allegorical or critical-selective reading and application of the Qur’ān are interwoven with this question. One can hardly underestimate the significance of this question in Islam, and especially in early Islam. The question of the source of authority was never ambiguous: “Muhammad is but a messenger; messengers have passed away before him.”<sup>30</sup>

#### 4 Theological Positions on the “Word of God”

In Sunni Islam God creates with His word. He does not create anything until He has said to it “Be”, although the word “be” itself is not creative. Even humans, and Jesus himself are, according to the Qur’ān, created because God said to them “Be”, and they are: “Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is”.<sup>31</sup>

But this is not so with the Qur’ān itself. God did not create the Qur’ān by saying to it “Be”, but He “spoke” it; thence the uncreated nature of the Qur’ān. God was always speaking with His Word (*Kalam*) which is His eternal attribute.<sup>32</sup> Ibn Kuttāb (d.240/854) one of the major respondents to the Mu‘tazilite theology which rejected the notion of eternity of God’s attributes, distinguishes the inherent speech of God (*kalām*) which is uncreated from the sound of the word (*kawl*), but he does not separate the two. This theology reminds us of the painstaking Christological controversies regarding the two natures in the one

30 S.3:144.

31 S.3:59.

32 A.S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology* (London, 1947), p. 107.

person of Christ and the Definition of Chalcedon (451): "... one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation",<sup>33</sup>

According to Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) the word inheres in the essence of God; the Arabic Qur'ān is a guide to this entity and is created, though it is neither body nor accident. In other words, the reading of the Qur'ān is other than the matter read; the matter inheres in God, the reading is created, acquired by man.<sup>34</sup> The Word of God (*kalām*) is the power of God to speak; the Qur'ān is the utterance (*kawl*). God does not speak by the utterance inhering in Him but by his being an utterer (*kailiya*).<sup>35</sup>

In the Christian theology, too, the Father is not the Son or the Word, but Father or begetter. The Word of God or the "utterance" is the "begotten one". God the Father does not reveal Himself by His "utterance" or by the "begotten one" but by his "begetting". We can notice here how, perhaps, the Trinitarian theology that speaks about the *personal* characteristics in the Godhead (begetting-Father; begotten-Son; proceeding-Holy Spirit) has influenced or has found an equivalent in the theology of the Qur'ān. Thus the Orthodox position with regard to the "Word of God" can be summarized in the following statements:

God speaks with an eternal word which has no beginning. This word (*kalām*) is speech (*kawl*) inhering in Himself; mental speech, not words or sounds.

It is One, but manifests itself in all forms of speech; it is command, prohibition, or statement. It is connected with the phenomenal but it is not itself phenomenal.<sup>36</sup>

In the second part of the statement, Muslim and Christian theologies on the "Word of God" depart from each other, as in Christianity the Word is manifested only and in a unique way, or rather person, in Jesus Christ. A more definite statement on the Word of God is found in the *Wasiya* (Testament) of Abu Hanifa (d.767):

We confess that the Kuran is the speech of Allah, uncreated, His inspiration and revelation, not He, yet no other than He, but His real quality,

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33 Cf. Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1974), p. 51.

34 Tritton, p. 108.

35 Tritton, p. 111.

36 Tritton, p. 186.

written in the copies, recited by the tongues, preserved in the breasts, yet not residing there. The ink, the paper, the writing are created, for they are the work of men. The speech of Allah on the other hand is uncreated, for the writing and the letters and the words and the verses are manifestations of the Kuran for the sake of human needs. The speech of Allah on the other hand is self-existing, and its meaning is understood by means of these things. Whoso sayeth that the speech of Allah is created, he is an infidel regarding Allah, the Exalted, whom men serve, who is eternally the same, His speech being recited or written and retained in the heart, yet never dissociated from Him.<sup>37</sup>

This statement is worth being analysed for its affinities with Christological theologies and theses. It is worth mentioning here that although Abu Hanifa and the Hanafites are committed to rational methods in theology, a central body appears to be in step with other Sunnites working out the Semitic dogmatic definition,<sup>38</sup> an analogy perhaps to the Fathers of the Church, especially the Cappadocians.

There had been a broad unanimity in the Muslim community with regard to the theology of the Qur'ān as the Word of God. The main and most articulate opposition was against the teaching of the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān, and this – interestingly enough – because of the resemblance of the doctrine to the Christian doctrine about Christ!

The opponents of this uncreatedness of the Qur'ān were the Mu'tazilites who favoured the absolute unity (*tawhid*) of God. The controversy over the Qur'ān brought about the downfall of the Mu'tazilite movement. The Muslim controversy reminds us of the similar, initial reaction to the eternity of the Son by Arius and the Arians ["There was a time when he (the Son) was not] and the beginning of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. It is a well-acknowledged fact that in formulating their doctrine of the Qur'ān Muslim theologians had in mind, one way or the other, Christian theses from the Logos theology and Christology.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting that 'Abbad b. Sulaiman who argued against Ibn Kullab called him a Christian for teaching that the Word was God. And a Christian had said that if Ibn Kullab had lived, all Muslims would have become Christians!<sup>40</sup>

37 Wensinck, p. 127.

38 W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1964), pp. 77–8.

39 Cf. Watt, p. 66.

40 Muhammad b. Ishāq Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, ed. B. Dodge (New York, 1970), p. 180; Cf. Tritton, p. 108.

## 5 The “Word of God” in the Tradition and in the Praxis of Islam

In Islam, “book”, “writing”, “pen” are categories and part of God’s domain. A prophet recites what is given to him even in a state of being unconscious. But that “book” or “writing” is essentially the “Word of God”. Here is how, according to a tradition, Muhammad received the Qur’ān:

When Muhammad the apostle of God reached the age of forty God sent him in compassion to mankind, ‘as an evangelist to all men’...

Wahb. b. Kaisan told me that ‘Ubayd said to him: Every year during that month the apostle would pray in seclusion and give food to the poor that came to him. And when he completed the month and returned from his seclusion, first of all before entering his house he would go to the Ka’ba and walk around it seven times or as often as it pleased God; then he would go back to his house until the year when God sent him, in the month of Ramadan in which God willed concerning him what He willed of His grace, the apostle set forth to Hira as was his wont, and his family with him. When it was the night on which God honoured him with his mission and showed mercy on His servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God. ‘He came to me,’ said the apostle of God, ‘while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, “Read!” I said, “What shall I read?” He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said, “Read!” I said, “What shall I read?” He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said “Read!” I said, “What shall I read?” He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said “Read!” I said, “What then shall I read?” – and this I said only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same to me again. He said: *“Read in the name of thy Lord who created, Who created man of blood coagulated. Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent, Who taught by the pen, Taught that which they knew not unto men.”* So I read it, and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart.<sup>41</sup>

The Night of Power and Excellence described in this tradition is not the actual “nativity” of the Qur’ān and of Islam; it is rather the Annunciation – the “impregnation” of the human by the divine. The Meccan period is the period

41 A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A translation of Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah*, (Oxford, 1968), pp. 104, 105–6. The quotation in italics are words of the Qur’ān, surah 96:1–5.



of “pregnancy” and its progressive visibility. It lasted 10–12 years! The last years of Mecca are the years of labour – and what a labour! The Hijrah (year 1 of the Muslim calendar) signalled the birth of the Muslim community in exile, beginning from a “cave” – an extremely close phenomenological affinity between Islam and Christianity.

Notice should be given to the following points of the narrative:

- a) These reminiscences of Muhammad are not words which are part of the Qur'ān but of the Hadith. The Muslims make a sharp distinction between the Word of God and the words of the Prophet, even when he is referring to or explaining the Qur'ān. Muhammad was only “the conduit of God's revelation”<sup>42</sup> or, more properly, the conduit through which it became possible for the Word of God to reach the human condition and community. Nasr calls the Qur'ān, “that central theophany of Islam”.<sup>43</sup> Martin Buber speaks of “theophanies” in Judaism with references to the burning bush, or to Isaiah's Vision of Annunciation, and other such instances, as a sign of a God who “can in Himself only be an invisible God who, however, becomes visible at”.<sup>44</sup>

Can Christianity use the word “theophany” for any Scriptures or event; or will it have to use the word “theophany” – as it has – for the birth of Jesus? Indeed the word Theophany was used in the early Church to indicate the Christmas day, as the Oration of Gregory the Theologian (c. 329-c.390) “On the Theophany, that is Nativity” indicates.<sup>45</sup>

- b) As Nasr observes, “it is of great significance that the first word of the Qur'ān to be revealed was “recite”, for the supreme symbol of revelation in Islam is a book”. Revelation in Islam is connected with a “Book” and in fact Islam envisages the followers of all revealed religions as a people of the Book” (*ahl-al-Kitāb*).<sup>46</sup>

42 F.E. Peters, *Children of Abraham, Judaism/Christianity/Islam* (Princeton, 1982), p. 108.

43 Nasr, p. 41.

44 Moses. *The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York, 1946, 1958), p. 117.

45 PG 36:321A-331A. The baptism of Jesus and the holiday associated with this event is also called “Epiphany”, that is God's appearance on earth.

46 Nasr, p. 42. In the Arab mind there seems to be a fascination about books. Perhaps the general illiteracy in pre-Islamic Arabia and in the early years after, or the contrast with literate communities like the Jewish community, basing their faith and life on books; or the influence coming from Christianity and Judaism with their “Scriptures” and various other (liturgical) books – all these seem to have attracted the Arab mind and fascinated it, as computers fascinate people today. Man's entire life is one of keeping a record of one's actions by one's personal angel. The Judgement Day also is the day of reckoning when *books* will be opened and when everyone will be shown his/her own *scroll*, or be given one's account to *read*.

- c) What is revealed about God in these very first utterances of the Qur'ān is that He is [the sole] Creator “who taught by the Pen”. The Qur'ān is a copy of the Archetypal Tablet which God has written with the Pen (*qalam*; in Greek *κάλαμος*!). The Pen symbolizes the Universal Intellect; the guarded or Archetypal Tablet symbolizes the substantial, material and passive pole of cosmic manifestation.<sup>47</sup> The Qur'ān then is the Logos in His cosmological and revelatory function; thence the finality of the Qur'ān as (especially in early Christianity) the finality of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> The sending down of the Qur'ān is an act of God's “compassion to mankind”. Thus the Qur'ān is a salvific act of God towards men.
- d) The Qur'ān is revealed on a night (a metaphor perhaps for the “sleeping” human reason and initiative?), which is called in Islam “The Night of Power and Excellence”. The Qur'ān, therefore, is a manifestation of God's power Who, although transcendent, has the *power* to speak the language of men. It is also a manifestation of excellence, in the sense that, in spite of the human ignorance, illiteracy, weakness and frailty, the Qur'ān is not conditioned by these human limitations but it is manifested in its full excellence. The “Night of Power and Excellence” reflects the nature of the Qur'ān, rather than the qualities of the Prophet.
- e) The prophet is not simply reluctant but powerless to recite something that he cannot read. He is “suffocated” by Gabriel the angel whose function in Islam is in many ways like that of the Holy Spirit in Christianity.<sup>49</sup> The Divine Message itself, remarks Nasr “had itself given him the power to recite the Book of God”,<sup>50</sup> in the same way as the Word of God in Christianity becomes Himself a man who dwells in the womb of Mary, who is without husband, and is born of her as human.<sup>51</sup>

The illiteracy of Muhammad not only has not been concealed but it has been projected in Islam with some exaggeration<sup>52</sup> even to underline the miraculous character of the Qur'ān. Muhammad performed no miracles.<sup>53</sup> If he did perform any miracle it was this one enacted on him through God, namely the

47 Cf. Nasr, p. 53.

48 Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Finality of Jesus Christ in an Age of Universal History. A Dilemma of the Third Century* (Richmond, Virginia, 1966).

49 Nasr, p. 42.

50 Ibid.

51 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos. Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 88, n. 27.

52 Cf. Watt, 33 ff.

53 Daniel J. Sahas, “The Formation of Later Islamic Doctrines as a Response to Byzantine Polemics: The Miracles of Muhammad”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), 307–324. See Chapter 4 in this volume.

recitation of a most eloquent and profound text by an illiterate human. The illiteracy of Muhammad is not simply an element of surprise for Islam; it is a necessity for the theology of the Qur'ān, as the virginity of Mary is a theological necessity for the Christian teaching of redemption.

The Divine Word can only be written on the pure and 'untouched' tablet of human receptivity. If this Word is in the form of flesh the purity is symbolized by the virginity of the mother who gives birth to the Word, and if it is in the form of a book this purity is symbolized by the unlettered nature of the person who is chosen to announce this Word among men".<sup>54</sup>

## 6 The "Qur'ān in the Qur'ān": A Self-Understanding

Of significance in understanding the Islamic doctrine of the Qur'ān is to consider briefly the names found in the Qur'ān about itself:

- a) *al-Quran* = Recital. It is the unconscious unpretentious and faithful recital of the word of God as this is transmitted by Him, through the Angel to the Prophet and repeated by the faithful. The name refers also to (i) the collection of recitals; (ii) revelations sent down by God; (iii) revelation which could not have been produced otherwise; (iv) it is to be recited by the Messenger; (v) to be listened to with respect; (vi) sent down not all at once; (vii) high claims are made for it: it is glorious, mighty, noble and clear.<sup>55</sup>
- b) *al-Kitāb*: it is *the Book* as reflected from the Heavenly Book or the Mother of the Book. The "Book" has the meaning of God's own mind (or the Christian *Logos*): "There is no beast on earth but God provides its sustenance; he knows its lair and its resting place (or its resting in the womb and its time of birth); all is *in a clear book*"! In Christianity God has created everything through His Logos who knows everything before even anything was made. The Logos is the mind and *the wisdom*, a clear reference to God's knowledge.<sup>56</sup>
- c) *ayat* "signs": natural phenomena which are signs of God's power and bounty. The Qur'ān itself is *the sign of God's power*.
- d) *dhikr* "remembrance". The Qur'ān is repeatedly perceived as the container, containing "the reminder [of God] been revealed unto him (alone)", even though there are some who doubt about God's "reminder

54 Nasr, pp. 43-4.

55 S.11:6/8. Cf. Watt, pp. 141ff.

56 S.8:75/6; 17:4; 33:6.

[Muhammad].<sup>57</sup> Is this, perhaps, a remote but some sort of equivalent Biblical inference to those whose minds are blinded and do not discern in the gospel the glory of Christ as he “who is the likeness [icon] of God”, “the image [icon] of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation”?<sup>58</sup> It certainly has these connotations for the Sufis, the mystics of Islam, who through a continuous repetition of the name of Allah and of Qur’ānic phrases and formulas strive to keep the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God alive. The equivalent mystical exercise in Christianity is the repetition of Jesus’ prayer.

- e) *furqan*, “salvation”. The name derives from a verb (*faraqa*) which means “to separate”. It is used with the meaning of separating and identifying the Muslims from the non-Muslims who, because of the Qur’ān, are more confident in and closer to salvation. It is the Qur’ān that is the sign and the guarantee of salvation. It was sent “in compassion to mankind”. Is the Bible itself equivalent to or the means of salvation for man according to Christianity? For Irenaeus and the earliest Christians who taught that the Church is the Body of *Christ*, it was rather outside Christ and his Body that there is no salvation (*extra ecclesia nulla salus*); not outside the Bible. Even Protestant theology proclaimed the *sola scriptura* as a definition of the source of *authority* rather than as the source of salvation, for which Protestant theology reserved its other slogan, the *sola fides*.
- f) *tanzil* “that which is sent down” (from v. *nazzala*). It is interesting that the phrase *tanzil l-Kitāb* (“sending down of a Book”) occurs in the headings of surahs 32, 39, 40, 45, 46 all of which, except surah 39, are introduced with “mysterious letters”.<sup>59</sup> The standard phrase which contains this self-reference to the Qur’ān itself reads: “The revelation of the Scripture is from Allah the Mighty, the Wise”, or “... the Knower” (S.40), or “... the Lord of the Worlds” (S.32).

The implication of this combination of mysterious letters and of the affirmation that this is a God-sent or God-given scripture points perhaps to the transcendent nature, or the “mystical” character of the Qur’ān, to the mystical nature of God’s revelation – “mystical” applying to the mystery or the divine character of the Qur’ān.

For Christianity the incarnation of the Word has revealed God but has not disclosed or destroyed the mystery of God; the incarnation of the Word affirms rather the divine mystery. The incarnation in itself is a mystery for Christianity,

57 S. 38:9.

58 Cf. 2 Cor. 4:4 and Col. 1:15.

59 Watt, p. 144.

and the mystery *par excellence* for that matter.<sup>60</sup> The body of the Qur'ān bears also the signs of a "mystery": (I) The surahs, unlike in any "rational" book are arranged not chronologically, but rather arbitrarily. The mystery of God can neither be confined to nor defined by any order or pattern. Thus with the Qur'ān a Muslim points to the *body* of God's Wisdom, Revelation and Might, in all its "absurdity" to human reason and conformity. The "unchronological", "unsystematic" appearance of the Qur'ān is the "Christ crucified" or the "foolishness of God" in Christianity which however is for the Christians "the power of God and the wisdom of God"<sup>61</sup> as the Qur'ān is for the Muslims. (II) The names of the surahs are not titles having anything to do with the content of a surah. They are arbitrarily chosen words – all words in the Qur'ān are the Word of God – from the text. The titles themselves are meaningless, a cross for the outsider who wants to read the Qur'ān as any other book, like "the word of the cross [which] is folly to those who are perishing".<sup>62</sup> (III) The Qur'ān cannot be interpreted simply by means of human reason alone outside the context and without the instruments of the Islamic theology and experience; in the same way as Christ cannot be seen as Christ without the eyes of a Christian and with the presuppositions of the Christian experience and tradition. Christ outside the Christian experience is not the Christ of the Christians and of their Bible, but possibly only in seminal form (*λόγος σπερματικός*). Muslim commentators of the Qur'ān (*tafsir*) reaffirm the uniqueness of the Qur'ān as Christians do with that of Christ. The Qur'ān is to be recited and "studied" even if it is not understood mentally, in the same way as the event of Christ, his incarnation and redemption, are termed and treated as "mysteries" by the Christian tradition; as articles of faith rather than as matters of proof.

## 7 The Qur'ān in Muslim Practice and Spirituality

(I) The Qur'ān is memorized by the Muslims, thus becoming a property of the heart rather than of the intellect. It is memorized in its Arabic original; thus not simply celebrating the memorial or the meaning of the glorious Qur'ān<sup>63</sup> but rather re-enacting the event of the Qur'ān in its original and direct form.

60 The Orthodox Christmas hymnology speaks of the event as "the strange mystery" of the Incarnation.

61 1 Cor. 1:22–25.

62 1 Cor. 1:18.

63 A translation of the Qur'ān is no longer the Qur'ān (= *the Recital*) itself. Sensitive to this belief, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall has called his translation of the Qur'ān, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York, n.d.) and Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran*

For a faithful Muslim not only the content and meaning comes from God, but also the container and form which are thus an integral aspect of the revelation.<sup>64</sup> Many have compared the recitation of the Qur'ān in Islam with the celebration of the Eucharist and the communion in Christianity. The recitation of the Qur'ān is the closest thing that a Muslim has in communicating with God. Al-Ghazzali, the greatest of Muslim theologians of all times (d.1111) quotes Muhammad admonishing Muslims to purify and perfume their mouths because "your mouths are a passageway for the Qur'ān."<sup>65</sup> It is a kind of confession and fasting that a Christian is expected to have prior to receiving communion. The Qur'ān also is recited in a special musical intonation that no other reading or prayer has. For some scholars the very word Qur'ān came from the Syriac *qeryana* meaning the intonated Scriptural reading or lesson in the Christian churches.<sup>66</sup> This interpretation of the word and the intonation of the text point to the liturgical context where the Qur'ān is "celebrated". It is not perhaps coincidental the fact that the "Qur'ān-period" or the period of self-awareness of the Muslim community and canonization of the Qur'ān coincide with the institutionalization of the ritual or formal prayer (*salāt*) in Islam.<sup>67</sup> This confirms Nasr's statement that the Qur'ān and the ritual prayer are interwoven, and that the Qur'ān has that transcendent, mystical affinity with the faith and life of a Muslim.<sup>68</sup> The earliest Christian celebrations were of events of Christ's life and particularly his Resurrection for which hymns were composed and sung.<sup>69</sup>

(11) The first sound chanted in the ear of the new-born is the *shahada*, or confession of faith contained in the Qur'ān, and other Qur'ānic recitations, like the *Surat-al-Fatihah* (The Opening Surah) of the Qur'ān. This is the closest to the Christian baptism where those who are baptized, adults or infants, are reborn and they have put on Christ.<sup>70</sup>

At death also the entire Qur'ān is recited for the deceased by groups of reciters as a way of committing the deceased one to God's revelation, as Christians commit the deceased one to Christ in the hope of the resurrection.

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*Interpreted* (New York, 1970) although in both cases this is an exact and very accurate translation of the Qur'ān.

64 Nasr, p. 42.

65 *Ihya*, vol. I, p. 124; quoted by Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London, 1985), p. 140.

66 Watt, p. 136.

67 Cf. Watt, p. 137.

68 Cf. Nasr, p. 44–5.

69 Cf. the testimony of Pliny the Younger.

70 Cf. Gal. 3:27.

In all activities and celebrations the Qur'ān is brought forth and recited, as in Christianity the presence and the witness of Christ is brought forth to sanctify such occasions as the marriage, establishing a new home, etc.

(III) Finally the treatment of the Qur'ān as writing is an act that requires a special reverence towards the "Word of God-made-a-Book". In the words again of Nasr, "to write the Qur'ān is like drawing an icon in Christianity".<sup>71</sup> And as the icon is theology in colours and the beauty of theology, so calligraphy of the Qur'ān is the depiction of the Word of God in a most aesthetic and imaginative way. In Islam the writing of the Qur'ān is a sacred act that requires years of spiritual practice, asceticism and purification as it was the case with the early Christian iconographers.<sup>72</sup>

## 8 As a Conclusion

What has made the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān and the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father prevail as the *orthodox teaching* in both religious traditions may not be the "logic" of these teachings, but their inner meaning and relevance to the experience and the life of the faithful. Both doctrines are not philosophical propositions as such but rather statements of faith; something which distinguishes essentially Religion from Philosophy, Christianity from Christianism, Islam from Islamism or Mohammedanism. This "something" can bring Muslims and Christians in a dialogue of *essentials* of each other's faith.

<sup>71</sup> Nasr, p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, and Fotis Kontoglou, *Ἐκφρασεις τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Εἰκονογραφίας*, Vol. I (Athens, 1960), p. xvii.

## The Formation of Later Islamic Doctrines as a Response to Byzantine Polemics: The Miracles of Muhammad

Sir William Muir in his celebrated work *The Life of Mohammed. From Original Sources*<sup>1</sup> has stated that “We do not find a single ceremony or doctrine of Islam in the smallest degree moulded, or even tinged, by the peculiar tenets of Christianity.” This conclusion, so emphatically stated, has emphatically been repeated by other prominent orientalist of the past, like Charles C. Torrey who has quoted Muir, although, in this instance, with the qualification that such a conclusion is to be limited to Muhammad and the Qurʾān.<sup>2</sup>

To refute this thesis would amount to an extensive research and writing. But I would say that this thesis can be refuted rather easily. As a matter of fact it must be refuted, not in order to question the autonomy and self-understanding of early Islam, but rather for the sake of understanding the earliest Islam and strengthening a more sophisticated Muslim-Christian dialogue today. Western orientalist, although much better informed now and appreciative of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, are still short of a personal sensitivity of the ethos and the inner dynamic of Eastern Christianity which the Western sages of the early twentieth century demonstrated as lacking in their study of Islam. I have a strong personal feeling collaborated by an abundance of evidence, that Islam has much more deeply rooted affinities with Eastern Christianity, and especially with forms and ideals of monasticism, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, than with Judaism and Christianity in general; but this is a life-long enterprise to even touch upon in a short paper. I have, even further, the suspicion that later Islamic doctrine, piety and practice was shaped to some considerable extent by the kind of Christian challenge and polemics – particularly those coming from certain Byzantine polemicists. The case has already been eloquently made by Alfred Guillaume,<sup>3</sup> but the possible sources have hardly been traced and

1 (Edinburgh, 1923), p. 148.

2 *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York, 1967), p. 82. This does not seem to be the opinion of modern Muslim commentators like Āsaf ‘Ali Asghar Faidi who has suggested to his colleagues that “The better we get acquainted with the contribution of Judaism and Christianity, the fuller insight we gain into the message and doctrines of the Prophet”; quoted by J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880–1960)* (Leiden, 1968), p. 68, n.2.

3 *The Traditions of Islam. An Introduction to the Study of the Hadith Literature* (Beirut, 1966), Chapter 6, “Borrowing from Christian documents and Tradition”, pp. 132–49.



explained; something to which this paper wants to contribute. It can be stated with a considerable certainty that the Muslim-Christian encounter during the Umayyad period (661–750), concentrated mainly on the previous eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire (particularly Syria), sharpened the appetite of the Muslims to seek a *theological* self-understanding and definition of Islam. The broad tolerance of the Umayyads promoted an even broader exchange between Islam and Christianity. On the other hand the Muslim-Christian polemics during the Abbasid period (750–early tenth century), concentrated mainly on the territory of the former Persian Empire, agitated the Muslims to compete with Christianity in the field of piety and spirituality. But I cannot prove this point without risking becoming overly lengthy and unacceptably general in statements and examples. I will, therefore, choose to deal with one aspect of the Islamic tradition, that of the Muhammad of faith, and more particularly his miracles,<sup>4</sup> referring to a few selective Byzantine writers of the early Abbasid period, the period of the development of the Hadith.

Islam, on the basis of the Qurʾān (and one has to be reminded here that the Qurʾān is believed to be the actual word of God), ascribes to prophets a central role in God's revelation; they are the means of God's communication to mankind. What is of paramount importance to Islam is that these prophets or apostles (*nabi* or *rasūl*) are human beings. It is only secondary that God has supplemented their mission with "signs," in order to make their message believable to doubting men. I will restrict the examples briefly to those prophets, namely Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad, to whom the Qurʾān ascribes the highest role of transmitting the will of God in writing, thus becoming the vehicles for the word of God to reach the earth.

The Qurʾān ascribes miracles to Moses. (Surah 7:160<sup>5</sup>) These miracles, however, are not manifestations of the powers of Moses but miracles of God. The smiting of the rock was ordered by God, although enacted by Moses. Other

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4 Whether a distinction between a Muhammad of history and a Muhammad of faith is legitimate, is less important than the fact that Islamic piety has firmly established the latter. (Cf. J.E. Royster's "The Meaning of Muhammad for Muslims. A Phenomenological study of recurrent images of the Prophet," Ph.D. dissertation, Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1970; and "The Study of Muhammad; A survey of approaches from the perspective of the History and Phenomenology of Religion," *The Muslim World*, 62 [1972] 49–70.) It is my contention that Christian Byzantine polemics contributed to the exaltation of Muhammad, which subsequently the Muslim piety enhanced and developed. In this respect the study of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, vis-à-vis the Eastern Christian polemics is long overdue. The Jewish and Christian influence on the *Sīra* was long suspected by Sprenger and Nöldeke, and noticed by Goldziher and Tor Andrae. Cf. "Sira" in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, H.A.R. Gibb & J.H. Kraemer, eds. (Leiden, 1965).

5 All passages from the Qurʾān are, for reasons of convenience, taken from M.M. Pickthall's translation, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York, n.d.).

“miracles of Moses” mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’ān are also acts of God, such as the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians (10:91), or the “tokens” or “revelations unto Pharaoh and his chiefs” (43:46–47). The Qur’ān does not allow the prophets to be autonomous agents of supernatural signs. They are not in themselves sources of creation, and consequently they cannot have control over it; they are themselves mortals. It is God who acts through the prophets.<sup>6</sup> The same principle applies to Jesus. He is also an agent of God’s actions. When Jesus fashions the likeness of a bird and “he breathes into it and it is a bird,” or when “he heals him who was born blind, and the leper,” or when “he raises the dead,” he does so “by Allah’s leave” (3:49), or by Allah’s “permission” (5:110).

Much more definite is the language of the Qur’ān when it refers to Muhammad. The Qur’ān alludes very strongly to the vigorous challenge of, and opposition to, Muhammad’s claim of prophet-hood. The relevant passages provide us with information regarding the expectations of his Quraish tribesmen and of the evolving Muslim understanding of prophethood.<sup>7</sup> A prophet must be able to show *proofs* of his claim, in terms of supernatural deeds. A messenger of God is expected to be something different than other human beings; perhaps an angel who does not eat nor does he walk in the market (25:7), or, at least, someone who is accompanied by an angel (6:8); someone who possesses a material treasure from heaven, or who eats from a paradisaal table (25:7). Muhammad rejects this notion of a prophet and affirms that a prophet is neither an angel, nor does he have an angel dwelling in him. He is only a man, who speaks to men (Cf. 6:8–9). Muhammad is ordered by God to speak with no pretention and with no authority of his own. He emphatically states that he, himself, has no “knowledge of the unseen” (7:188), nor is he an angel (6:50). In the Qur’ān the Quraish appear to be desperate for “signs” (2:118; 3:183): “if only a portent were sent down upon him from his Lord!” (10:21; 6:37; 13: 27). In the demand for a “portent”, God confirms to Muhammad that he is not getting any; “Thou art a warner only, and for every folk a guide” (13:7).

6 Exception should be taken to Adel-Théodore Khoury’s definite statement that the Qur’ān considers the signs of Moses, and of Jesus, as signs of their mission and reliability. *Polemique byzantine contre l’islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Leiden, 1972), p. 42. All Qur’ānic references he cites (p. 42, n. 87; p. 43, n. 86) speak, precisely, of “Our (God’s) token,” or of “proofs from (your) Lord,” or “Our revelations,” etc.

7 Almost all passages referring to this opposition to and clarification of Muhammad’s prophethood, as well as those referring to Moses’ signs are from the late Meccan period (i.e., prior to 622 AD). The shift of the opposition from the polytheists in Mecca to the Jews and Christians is reflected in a Medinan passage where “the People of the Book ask of thee [i.e. Muhammad] that thou shouldst cause an (actual) Book to descend upon them from heaven” (4:153)!

There is only one single reference in the Qurʾān (6:35) which gives the impression that Muhammad could, somewhat, be able to bring a portent and convince his opponents:

And if their aversion is grievous unto thee, then if thou canst, seek a way down into the earth or a ladder unto the sky that thou mayst bring unto them a portent (to convince them all)! – If Allah willed, He could have brought them all together to the guidance – So be not thou among the foolish ones.

But such a miracle is stated as a most improbable and hypothetical one. As a matter of fact the proposition is dismissed outright as foolish. Elsewhere in the Qurʾān Muhammad is praised for not having fallen into the temptation of even attempting to give his opponents what they demanded of him: “And if We had not made thee wholly firm thou mightest almost inclined unto them a little.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, on the basis of the Qurʾān, there seems to be in the minds of those contemporary to Muhammad – from whom the earliest Muslims were drawn – a rather well-defined notion of what is a prophet. This notion suggested a set of pre-requisites and qualifications, including the ability of the prophet to show supernatural deeds; to be different in nature, possibly a supernatural being, or to be accompanied by an angel; to possess material treasures from heaven; to eat from a paradisaal table (that is to have some divine association), to have portents accompanying him and his message. Sūrah 17:89–93 summarizes the pagan expectations from a prophet with some specific examples of “signs”: to cause a spring to gush from the earth; rivers to gush in a garden; heaven to fall upon men; to ascend into heaven; to bring down a book which men can read!

Muhammad rejected such a notion and disavowed for himself any such power. The only token given to Muhammad is the message itself (6:125) and the Scripture (29:50), that is the Qurʾān which no other agent can produce (17:88).<sup>9</sup>

8 17:74. This passage is traditionally used not so much in reference to Muhammad's miracles but as an abrogation of the earlier famous “satanic verses” of the Qurʾān (53:19–23). Cf. also 22:51.

9 See also 10:16–17, 38; 11:13; 28:49. Later Islamic theology elaborating on these passages developed the doctrine of the miraculous character and inimitability of the Qurʾān. Cf. W.M. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qurʾān* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 30–31, 33, 35–37. For the many Muslim authors on the subject see L. Gardet, M.M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane. Essai de théologie comparée* (Paris, 1948), p. 41, n.2. For al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), the main exponent of the doctrine of the miraculous character of the Qurʾān, miracles do not prove the divinity of Jesus as this would imply that the other miracle-performing prophets – including Muhammad – were divine, too. Cf. A. Abel, “Le chapitre sur le Christianisme dans le ‘*Tahmid*,’ d'al-Bāqillānī (mort en 1013), *Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Levi-Provençal*, 5, 1 (Paris, 1962), p. 8.

Actually the message, or the writing itself, is the only sign for any prophet, as it was for the other two literate prophets David and Jesus who brought down “the Psalms and ... the Scriptures giving light” (3:184), respectively. Not even the pronouncement of a Qur’ān is able to cause an extraordinary event for the unbeliever to believe: “Had it been possible for a Qur’ān<sup>10</sup> to cause the mountains to move, or the earth to be torn asunder, or the dead to speak, (this Qur’ān would have done so)...” (13:31). This statement seems to be in tension with Jesus’ words “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you” (Matt. 17:20), and “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, ‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you” (Lk. 17:6). And yet in the earliest collection of traditional narratives about Muhammad we read of such miracles as the following:

... the Apostles of Allah – upon whom be Allah’s blessing and peace – was at al-Hajūn and was in grief and distress. He said: ‘Allahumma, show me this day a miracle, after which I will not care who among my people treats me as false.’ Now there was a tree ahead on the road leading to Madina, so he summoned it, and, separating itself from the earth, it came till it was before him and salaamed to him. Then when he commanded it, it returned [to its place]. He said: ‘After this I care not who among my people treats me false.’<sup>11</sup>

In this narrative (reminding ourselves of the distinction made by the Muslims between the words of the Qur’ān and of the words of the Prophet) it is Muhammad’s own words that result in a miracle! Following this one, there are two more similar miracles, in a rather amusing context. Muhammad, out of modesty, orders two trees to join together in order to satisfy his physical needs in private! Is this an effort on the part of the earliest Muslims, who might have heard of those words of Jesus, to depict Muhammad as the true man of faith whom Jesus was longing for, in vain, among his contemporaries? Is this, perhaps, an effort to show the fulfilment of Jesus’ words in Muhammad, “the seal”

10 Pickthall translates the word Qur’ān as “Lecture”. The word here stands for a single recital or pronouncement, not for the whole book.

11 Ibn Sa’d (764–845), *Kitāb at-Tabaqat al-Kabīr* (Leiden, 1907), 1. The section of the Miracles has been translated by A. Jeffery, ed., in his *A Reader on Islam* (S-Gravenhage, 1962), p. 309. The entire book has been translated into English by S.M. Haq and H.K. Ghazanfar (2 vols., Leiden, 1967–72).

of the Prophets? What were the causes and the stimulus for the emergence of power and of the embellishment of the life of Muhammad with miracles?

The Qurʾān alludes that already at the time of Muhammad the Jews demanded from him “a greater thing of Moses aforesaid” (4:153). Later Byzantine polemicists did precisely that on the part of Christianity; they compared the signs of Moses with those of Jesus and found the signs of Jesus greater than those of Moses. Thus, they justified to the Muslims the superiority and the supersession of Christianity over Judaism. This logic left Islam responsible to justify its superiority and supersession over Christianity by ascribing to Muhammad even greater signs than those of Jesus. In the Muslim-Christian controversy, during the earliest Abbasid caliphate, the original Islamic notion of a prophetic-progressive revelation (according to which a prophet fulfils and complements the message of the previous prophet, and thus the matter of signs and miracles does not enter the debate)<sup>12</sup> develops into a notion according to which every later prophet supersedes and abrogates the previous prophet on account of his *personal greatness*; thus the matter of signs and miracles becomes an indispensable criterion for comparison. ‘Amr ibn Bahr Jāhiz (776?–869?), a Mutazilite from Basra, and a most able *abid* (a serious thinker with a popularizing and entertaining wit) believes<sup>13</sup> that Muhammad had in his record many “signs, arguments, proofs, and miracles, diverse manifestations of his wondrous life, both at home and abroad.” However, his contemporaries were not so mindful in collecting these evidences, as they were in compiling the Qurʾān. “The first Muslims were brought (to commit this omission) by their confidence in the manifest radiance (of the acts of the Prophet).” He acknowledges that in his times Islam was under challenge and that such evidence would have been very useful for the defence of the faith. He writes:

(if our ancestors had carried out this task, no one) today could challenge the truth of these things, neither atheist *zindig*, stubborn materialist, licentious fop, gullible moron or callow stripling.

12 Cf. for example Anastasios Sinaites (640–700), John of Damascus (ca. 652–750). Unlike the Byzantine writers of the early Umayyad period who are primarily reacting to the conquests of the Arabs and writing about their religion, the later ones are engaging in apologetics of Christianity and in polemics against Islam. Cf. W.E. Kaegi, “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest,” *Church History* 38 (1969), 139–49 and D.J. Constantelos, “The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as revealed in the Greek sources of the seventh and the eighth centuries,” *Byzantion* 42 (1973), 325–57.

13 C. Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāhiz* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 40.

The quotation is indicative of the pressure under which the Islamic community was from outside, as well as from within, to produce a higher profile for Muhammad, and of the inadequacy of the Mutazilite rationalism to spark enthusiasm among the Muslim populace.

On the Christian side Theodore Abū Qurra (ca. 750–825) from Edessa, bishop of Haran in Mesopotamia, appears to be a characteristic exponent and possible source of this change in the Islamic prophetology and in the tone of the Muslim-Christian encounter. Abū Qurra in one of his Refutations of Islam<sup>14</sup> states explicitly that the Muslims are wrong in assuming that Moses and Jesus became believable because of their teaching and of their message. Each one of them became believable because there was a previous prophecy about him, *as well as* because of “the signs, marvels and various powers” he performed. No one, therefore, should believe in Muhammad for what he preached and taught, without such proofs. The implication is quite clear: Muhammad’s teaching is one thing, which might have merit; but this is not enough to qualify him as a prophet, without supernatural signs. If such signs could be shown one could, possibly, accept him as a prophet. The challenge for the Muslim is even clearer. Find out, discover (or possibly invent) miracles to make your prophet believable! Abū Qurra sounds, perhaps, suggestive when he specifies the kind of signs Moses performed: he threw his rod and it became a snake; he put his hand in his chest and it contracted leprosy; he pulled it out again and it was clean. He turned the water into blood. Then he gives a list of Jesus’ signs: his supernatural conception; the change of water into wine; the healing of blind men, of lepers, of paralytics and men of other infirmities; his transfiguration; the expulsion of demons; the feeding of a crowd; the raising of dead; rectification of physical handicaps. Abū Qurra implies that every later prophet must show more signs than the previous one. If Muhammad were, indeed, a prophet he ought to have performed greater miracles. His refutation ends with a direct challenge, and

14 “... (Θεοδώρου τοῦ τὸ ἐπίκλην Ἀβουκαρὰ ἐπισκόπου Καρῶν) διὰ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ), PG 94: 1596B–97C. Although I have treated this text as one that reflects basically the *thought* of John of Damascus (Cf. *John of Damascus on Islam, “The Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* [Leiden, 1972], pp. 99ff), I do not assume that John of Damascus phrased this dialogue in this exact way or that he was challenging in it the Muslims to produce miracles of Muhammad. John of Damascus’ trilogy on Islam is clearly systematic and theological, addressing itself to its essentials: a) an Introduction to Islam (ch. 100/101 *On the Heresies*), b) The Islamic doctrine of free will and predestination (*Disputation*); and c) The Islamic claim of the prophetic-progressive revelation (*Disputation of Abū Qurra through the voice of John of Damascus*).

possibly, directive to the Muslims: “Where is, then, your prophet? This is clear (i.e. he is to be found nowhere).”<sup>15</sup>

In another brief polemic work of his<sup>16</sup> Abū Qurra sets forth again the two criteria by which he judged Muhammad’s claim to prophethood, the existence of a testimony by a previous prophet and the demonstration of miracles. He says to his Muslim interlocutor:<sup>17</sup>

My father has taught me to accept a messenger (only) if he has been foretold by a previous one, and if he has proven himself reliable through signs. Your Muhammad, however, is completely deprived of and irrelevant to both. For neither an old prophet pre-announced him as a prophet, nor did he prove himself reliable through signs.<sup>18</sup>

The Muslim responds that Muhammad meets both these criteria. He was foretold by Jesus,<sup>19</sup> but the Christians have deleted his prophecy from the gospel. As to the second criterion, here is how the dialogue develops:

The Barbarian: Even though I have no testimony (now, of Muhammad’s prophethood) from the Gospel, yet from the signs he performed he is proven to be a true prophet.

The Christian: What sign did he perform?

The Barbarian, having turned to a falsified mythology and unable to say anything true, got quiet.<sup>20</sup>

On this last note and with the question of miracles as the highlight of the Muslim inability to prove his prophet, the “dialogue” ends. It is unfortunate,

15 PG 96:1597C.

16 *Opusculum*, no. 19, PG 97:1544A–45A.

17 The anti-Islamic works of Abū Qurra are in the form of dialogues between a Christian and a Muslim. We must assume that in these dialogues the interlocutors are fictitious characters. However such dialogues, which were written as easy manuals for the sake of Christians, reflect real circumstances, and imply actual confrontations.

18 PG 97:1544CD. Progressively Byzantine writers challenged the prophethood of Muhammad on the basis of five criteria, not necessarily in that order: testimonies of revelation, testimonies of previous prophets, proofs of prophetic ability, proof of miracles, and examination of his personal character. Cf. A.Th. Khoury, *La Controverse byzantine avec l’Islam* (vii<sup>e</sup> Cahier d’Études Chrétiennes orientales, *Foi et Vie* (Paris, 1969), pp. 38–40. The history of the Muslim-Christian dialogue shows a systematic response on the part of the Muslims to each one of these challenges and a reversion of the Christian criticism. It seems to me, however, that this exercise resulted in the gradual exaltation of Muhammad and contributed to a change in the religion from Islam to Mohammedanism.

19 An implicit reference to John 15:23–26 and 16:7–15, as well as to Sūrah 61.6.

20 PG 97:1545A.

from the historical point of view, that Abū Qurra gives us no indication as to the kind of miracles the Muslim had cited. What we gather from this exchange with certainty, is that as early as the late eighth century there were traditions of miraculous acts of Muhammad which the Muslims used for apologetic purposes.

Another polemic writing, the letter to the “Emir at Damascus” attributed to Arethas, Archbishop of Caesarea (850-early tenth century), compares Jesus to Muhammad also in terms of miracles. It says:

We Christians were informed from many prophets who pre-announced the presence on earth of Christ, the Son of God and God, and we learned of him and believed in him through the deeds this same Jesus Christ did on earth. For, everything that the prophets ... pre-announced about Christ was accomplished by him, that he will be born of a virgin and that he will perform many miracles on earth, he will raise men from the dead, will expel demons from men, and will heal sick men, and that he will be crucified by the lawless Jews ...<sup>21</sup>

Did such a challenge have any impact upon the Muslims? Ibn Sa’d (764–845) is one of the earliest authorities of *hadith* related to the Prophet. He died only twenty years after Abū Qurra. His main work *Kitāb at-Tabaqāt* (Book of Classes) is a basic source of information and traditional narratives of the life of the Prophet, his companions and his successors.

A section of his work is devoted to the miracles of Muhammad. It is quite interesting that several of these miracles sound as if they are being offered as responses to such Christians as Abū Qurra, and they bear an amazing resemblance to miracles of Jesus found in the Gospels.<sup>22</sup> I venture (although reluctantly) to suggest that there is an intriguing, subtle parallelism between the two sets of miracles. What one should notice in this juxtaposition is not the similarity between the two cases, but rather the characteristically equivalent theme, or the message that transpires through the narrative. Here is a selective list of them:

21 P. Karlin-Hayter, “Arethas’ letter to the Emir at Damascus”, *Byzantion* 29–30 (1919–60), 293.

22 Ref. to the text in A. Jeffery *A Reader on Islam*, pp. 309–30. For reasons of a better accounting I have numbered each miracle as it begins with a new *isnād*, or chain of transmitters.



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1, 2, 3	Muhammad's command causes trees to be uprooted and then returned to their place.	[Cf. Lk. 17:6]
5	Muhammad ascends into heaven sitting on a branch of a tree with Gabriel sitting on another.	[Cf. Lk. 24:50-51 and Mt. 4:6]
6	Muhammad is protected from his enemies.	[Cf. Lk. 20:19; Jn. 7:20-46, esp. 7:30]
10	Muhammad turns water into milk and fresh goat cheese.	[Cf. Jn. 2:1-11]
11	A wolf addresses a shepherd and bids him to go where the Prophet is preaching.	[Cf. Jn. 1:43-49?]
12	Muhammad raises his gaze to the sky and then to the ground while exhorting his listeners against sensuality.	[Cf. Jn. 8:1-11]
13	Muhammad reveals to his Jewish challengers four hidden matters.	[Cf. Jn. 4:4-19]
15	Muhammad reveals the names of those 'hypocrites' who had been speaking against him.	[Cf. Lk. 13:10-17 and Mt. 9:3-4]
17-25, 26, 27, 34,35	Muhammad causes water or food multiply, wherefrom many people either perform ablutions or feed themselves.	[Cf. Mt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:32-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-13]
36	Muhammad heals a man with a bad eye.	[Cf. Mk. 8:22-26 and elsewhere]
37	Muhammad causes a tree branch to become a steel sword.	[Cf. Lk. 22:35-38?]
40	Muhammad foretells the destruction of prejudicial documents of the Quraish against the Banu Hashim.  In two other miracles (29 and 32) Muhammad causes either a dry ewe or an immature she-kid to produce	

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It seems that the miracles given by Ibn Sa'd precede the miracles developed later by the Muslim community, on the basis of the Qur'an. The Muslim piety began first and moved faster to influence the course of the theological definition of the Qur'an as the uncreated word of God. On the other hand, the process of this theological definition forced the Muslim community to eventually downplay the "apocryphal" miracles of Ibn Sa'd and standardize those for which the Qur'an provides a "canonical" basis. It is interesting that the earliest Christian anti-Islamic polemicists did not know – or at least they do not refer to – these miracles. The use of the *mir'āj* story, for example, appears for the first time in 'Ali Tabarī's (middle of the ninth century) defence of Islam.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, the Qur'an in its cryptic, "laconic and reserved" or "pregnant words"<sup>24</sup> provided the basis for the development of elaborate miraculous deeds of Muhammad. The most characteristic case is, of course, the *mir'āj*,<sup>25</sup> or the ascension of the Prophet to heaven, based on Sūrah 17:1.

Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship to the Far Distant Place of Worship the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of Our tokens!<sup>26</sup>

Another case is the narrative of the splitting of Muhammad's breast,<sup>27</sup> based on Sūrah 94:1–4.

Have We not caused thy bosom to dilate,  
And eased thereof the burden  
Which weighed down thy back;  
And exalted thy fame?

23 *The Book of Religion and Empire*, transl. by A. Mingana (Manchester, 1922), pp. 30ff. Cf. also Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> S.)*, p. 47.

24 Cf. Muir, *Life*, p. lx; and lxx–lxxi.

25 For an easy access to the traditional account of the *mir'āj* see A. Jeffrey, *Islam. Muhammad and his Religion* (Indianapolis, 1958), pp. 35–46, and to his *A Reader on Islam*, pp. 621–39. Cf. also Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension, King and Saviour V* (Uppsala, 1955); and M-R. Seguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet* (New York, 1977).

26 Cf. also 53:13–18.

27 A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 71–72. Cf. also Harris Birkeland, *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammad's Breast* (Oslo, 1955).

Also Sūrah 5:11 gave rise to the traditional story of Gabriel striking an enemy of Muhammad the moment he was about to smite the Prophet with a sword.<sup>28</sup> Finally Sūrah 54:1 (“The hour drew nigh and the moon was rent in twain”) gave rise to the tradition of the splitting of the moon.<sup>29</sup> A strange appearance of the moon in the sky as if it had been torn asunder, astonishes the people of Mecca as the idolaters were persecuting Muhammad. Although this is not used as a miracle of the Prophet, cited in the context of Muhammad’s confrontation with the unbelievers, it plays the role of a miraculous reaffirmation of his prophetic authority.

Bartholomeos of Edessa (ninth century?) represents that group of Byzantine polemicists who find themselves now in a position to counteract the “canonical” miracles of Muhammad. After challenging the prophethood of Muhammad on the basis that he pronounced no prophecy, nor did he foretell things which were going to happen even to himself,<sup>30</sup> he takes up the matter of miracles as a necessary proof of prophethood. For Bartholomeos, Muhammad could be taken as an apostle if the Qur’ān “did not contain at times the truth and at times the false,”<sup>31</sup> but he certainly is not a prophet, for we know a prophet from his prophecy, from the signs and from the marvels. We (Christians) have such a prophet who foretells the future as well as what took place in the past, and who shows signs and marvels. We know, however, nothing of this sort from Muhammad, so that we may call him prophet or apostle. If you yourself know anything, tell me. I do not know of any. If you know show this to me, where and in which book it is written. I have gone through all your books but I found nothing worthied, except things worth of laughter.<sup>32</sup>

Bartholomeos ridicules the tradition of Muhammad’s ascension and admonishes his Muslim interlocutor to disregard such a story:

Muhammad, being made of earth, a creature, servant, mortal and corruptible, did not ascend into heaven. Do not deceive yourself that it is true that he ascended into heaven or that his daughter Fatima testifies to this event.<sup>33</sup>

28 Cf. al-Wākidī (797–874) who is considered second only to Ibn Ishāq in biographical narratives of Muhammad. Cf. also, Muir, *Life*, p. lxx, n. 1.

29 Cf. A.J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition, Alphabetically Arranged* (Leiden, 1960), p. 164.

30 *Confutation of the Hagarene*, PG 104:1389AB.

31 1380D.

32 1392A.

33 1400D.

He returns to this miracle on various occasions<sup>34</sup> and he, mistakenly, attributes all its details to the Qurʾān itself.<sup>35</sup> This is indicative of two things: First that the *mirʾāj* by the late ninth century had become a central theme in the Islamic faith, and second that the “canonical” miracles of the Qurʾān predominated over the “apocryphal” ones of Ibn Saʿd. Bartholomeos, in spite of his claim that he had read all the books of the Muslims, does not refer to any such miracles. Bartholomeos is also aware of the miracle of the splitting of the moon for which there is also a Qurʾānic reference.<sup>36</sup> Later on he undertakes a rather detailed excursus through the life of Muhammad for the sake of his Muslim interlocutor because, as he claims,

you do not know everything. I know (about him) and I know it very well. If you do not know your literature you do not know mine either.... Thus, you are not in a position to know exactly about Muhammad as we Christians do! Because we, Christians, have been around before Muhammad and we know exactly everything about him!<sup>37</sup>

On this basis Bartholomeos goes on to compare extensively Muhammad to Jesus, in terms of supernatural events and miracles: There is no comparison between their mothers and the way they conceived their sons. Furthermore Jesus performed miracles which Muhammad did not. He did not raise anyone from the dead, nor any Lazaros after four days in the grave, nor did he open the eyes of a man born blind; he did not heal men with diseases, deaf or dumb men; he did not ease storms, enter rooms through closed doors, transfigure himself in front of his disciples, nor was he immortal.<sup>38</sup> “And yet you, shamelessly, claim that Muhammad is like Jesus Christ!”<sup>39</sup> After lengthy parallels between Muhammad and Jesus, Bartholomeos questions once more the Muslim, “How, then, do you say that he (Muhammad) is brother of Jesus?”<sup>40</sup>

It is clear that by the end of the ninth century the Muslim piety had reached the point in which Muhammad compared satisfactorily to Jesus, in terms of signs and miracles. With such a record the challenge now returns to the Christians to prove that Muhammad is inferior to Jesus, in character and morality. The process of the Christianization of Muhammad and the Islamization of

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34 1432D and esp. 1440C.

35 “... as I have read in your Qurʾān,” 1392C; and 1432D–41B.

36 1429D and 1432D. Cf. also above n. 29.

37 1417.

38 Cf. 1417BC.

39 1417D.

40 1388B.

Jesus has been completed. The attack against the personality and morality of Muhammad begins.<sup>41</sup>

### Summary and Concluding Remarks

That the false comparison between Muhammad and Jesus is the, or one of the central issues of contention between Islam and Christianity, is very well known. That the place and function of Muhammad in Islam was from the beginning misunderstood by the Christians is also known and abundantly manifested in the entire Christian anti-Islamic literature, East and West. This was not entirely the fault of the Christians. Modern Muslim thinkers and Christian orientalisists<sup>42</sup> are more forceful and theologically more intuitive and sensitive to suggest that the proper theological affinity exists between Muhammad and the virgin Mary as the chosen agents to bring forth the Word of God, or between the Qur'ān and Jesus as the manifestation of the Word of God, or between the Hadith and the gospels as the produce of the apostolic tradition. But this more balanced phenomenological understanding is the result of a long and painful confrontation between the two religious communities, and they are articulated still by lonely voices. The understanding of the essential difference between Islam and Christianity has, for the majority of Muslims and Christians, been halted in the spirit of the controversies of the late eighth and ninth centuries.

The authoritative position of the Qur'ān on the matter notwithstanding, the embellishment of Muhammad's life with miracles is due mainly to three Islamic factors: first to the religious fervour and piety of the believers; second to the absence of Qur'ānic criticism in the Muslim community; and third to the existence of discrete allusions in the Qur'ān to supernatural acts involving Muhammad.<sup>43</sup> What we want to suggest is that the direct challenge of Christian polemicists comparing Muhammad to the Jesus of the gospels is also one of the immediate and effective causes of the exaltation of Muhammad. The indication of such a challenge is certainly clear. As far as the process of this development is concerned, it seems that there are two kinds of miracles attributed to Muhammad, one which the Muslim piety developed by delving into the "apostolic tradition" and another one which finds its source in allusive wordings of the Qur'ān. The former seems to have been produced at the demand of popular

41 Cf. above n. 18.

42 Cf. for example S. Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Boston, 1972), and W.C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New York, 1957).

43 Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam*, pp. 43ff.

piety, as well as a response to outside challenges, especially Christian polemics. The miracles of Muhammad from the “apostolic tradition” tend to resemble acts of Jesus in an effort to match Muhammad to Jesus, successfully. In the meantime the development in the theological-speculative sphere, in regard to the qualities of God and the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān, forced the Muslims to seek Qur’ānic substantiation for the miracles of Muhammad. Certain wordings of the Qur’ān provided the gist for such “miracles.” The proliferation of miracles and the gradual exaltation of the Prophet forced the Christian polemicists to change emphasis, and attack now the character of Muhammad.

From the Christian point of view it is interesting to note that while the gospel narrative is full of miracles of Jesus, the word “miracle” does not occur in the gospels, except twice in two other books of the New Testament (2 Cor. 11:14 and Rev. 17:6). What appears in the gospels is three times the word “marvel” (Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22 and Jn. 4:48) and over thirty times the word “sign” or “pointer”. This is a significant indicator of the self-understanding of the “miracle” by the New Testament itself. I have no desire to enter the territory of the New Testament scholars, with no such credentials. But even a layman, when reading the gospels, cannot help noticing what is by now a rather well-documented conclusion:<sup>44</sup> that the progressive character of the biblical text – teaching, imageries and especially the miracles – is masterfully leading and “pointing to” the Resurrection, the miracle *par excellence*! The proclamation of the gospel and the key to the understanding of the essence of Christianity is to be found at the end of the narrative. It is under the light of the Resurrection that a Christian, in spite of Jesus’ expressed disapproval of the miracles as proofs (Mt. 12:39), can find, in retrospect, meaning in them.

If this is the case, one should be open to the Muslim assertion<sup>45</sup> that under the light of the event of the Qur’ān – the miracle *par excellence* of Islam – all other “miracles” of Muhammad, implicit or explicit, historical or apocryphal, are manifestations of, and pointers to, this cardinal event: that the uncreated Word of God became manifest and was spoken through a mortal man, in space and time.

44 Cf. F.C. Grant, *The Gospels: Their origin and their growth* (New York, 1957).

45 Cf., for example, the views of Tāhā Husayn, ‘Abbās Mahmud al-‘Aqqād and others in A. Wessels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muhammad* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 9ff.

## Monastic Ethos and Spirituality and the Origins of Islam

Monastic ethos and ideals are at the root of Islam and form part of its essential character, as Muslim scholars themselves have acknowledged. As Seyyed Husseyn Nasr writes:

One could in fact say ... that Islam “is a democracy of married monks”, that is, a society in which equality exists in the religious sense in that all men are priests and stand equally before God as his vice-regent on earth!<sup>1</sup>

Such a view of Islam has escaped the attention not only of modern Historians of Religions, but also of Byzantine polemicists most of whom, ironically enough, were prominent members of the monastic community. Little attention has been paid to the inherent Byzantine ascetic ethos, practice and spirituality in Islam, especially earliest Islam. The earliest encounter of Islam with “official” Christianity, that is with the Byzantines, took place in the context of warfare and the Arab conquests, which resulted in the loss of the eastern Byzantine to Arab Muslims. Such experiences precluded a sober view of Islam on its own merits and prevented any of its essential characteristics to surface. Thus earliest Islam was never seen by the Byzantine polemicists as a faith system embedded in the monastic ethos and culture of the Christian East; and this omission was never rectified by the subsequent generations of controversialists, East and West.

The value and the impact of Byzantine monasticism on Islam seem to have been acknowledged by the members of the third/ninth century encyclopedic Fatimid philosophical society, the Ikhwān as-Safāʾ, the “Brethren of Purity”, or the “Sincere Brothers”,<sup>2</sup> who considered that

the ideal and morally perfect man should be of East Persian derivation, Arabic in faith, of Iraqi education, a Hebrew in astuteness, a disciple of Christ in conduct, *as pious as a Greek [Eastern Roman, i.e. Byzantine]*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ideals and realities of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> On the society, see Henri Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1964), pp. 190–4.

*monk*, a Greek in the individual sciences, an Indian in the interpretation of all mysteries, but lastly and especially a Sufi in his whole spiritual life.<sup>3</sup>

In this brief list of virtues monastic, and sufi, ideals and characteristics are mentioned twice, if not three times if one counts among them the “discipleship of Christ in conduct”; and this certainly is indicative of how much monasticism and spirituality were valued by this Brotherhood. Of course, more easily one can discern the many historical, cultural and spiritual affinities between sufism or aspects of Shi’a Islam and Eastern asceticism and monasticism;<sup>4</sup> but this is not our topic. Our topic is the ethos of Christian asceticism and spirituality in the way earliest Islam saw and translated it into a way of life as a “democracy of married *monks*”.

The fifth and sixth centuries are the period of the flourishing of Byzantine monasticism, particularly in the Syro-Palestinian region and Egypt, as a remarkable spiritual and intellectual force;<sup>5</sup> the timing, therefore, of the birth of Islam may not be coincidental or unrelated to this phenomenon. Monasticism, ascetic and anchoritic monasticism in particular, had been known to the Arab nomads, and had touched and made a profound impression upon them prior to and at the time of the birth of Islam. Pre-Islamic Arab poetry makes frequent reference and allusions to ascetics, their daily life and ideals. Imr al-Qais’ “*The Wandering King*”, an ode which describes a thunder storm in the desert, compares the lighting to the glittering flames of the lamp of an anchorite “as he slops the oil over the twisted wick”.<sup>6</sup> The poet had not simply imagined,

3 Quoted by R. Ettinghausen, “The man-made setting. Islamic Art and Architecture”, in B. Lewis, ed., *Islam and the Arab World* (New York: Alfred A. Knops, 1976), p. 57. Emphasis is ours.

4 The comparative study of mystical movements has been researched rather extensively; see, for example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm and Sufism”, in *Orthodox Christians and Muslims*, ed. by N.M. Vaporis (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1986), pp. 195–203; Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 61–66 (the whole part “Experiences of the Mystic Light” is significant for the phenomenon of *dhikr* in world religions); and R. Payne, *The Holy Fire* (London: Skeffington & Son Ltd., 1958), pp. 200 ff.

5 On this well-known subject, see Derwas James Chitty, *The desert a city; an introduction to the study of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966); and also the archaeological evidence provided by Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1992).

6 Cf. A.J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 21. That in this ode the allusion is to a *Byzantine* anchorite may be deducted from another ode, *Tarafa “Who Died Young”* where Byzantine bridge building is mentioned and where the poet compares the “widely spaced elbows” of the she-camel of Tarafa, the young man who was executed in his twenties, with “the bridge of the Byzantine, whose builder swore it should be all encased in bricks to be raised up true”. Arberry, *Aspects*,



but perhaps had been a witness to such a scene at night inside the cell of an anchorite either as a guest or servant (*hypotaktikos*) of an anchorite. Monastic literature, such as the *Narrations* of Anastasius Sinaites (c. 640–c. 700), makes frequent reference to Arabs serving monks.<sup>7</sup> The choice of the particular parallelism between lighting in the desert and the sparkling oil lamp of an anchorite is not accidental. The light in an ascetic's cell in the middle of the night in the desert was a familiar image and a most impressive and memorable experience for an itinerant caravan driver. Experienced and transmitted for generations the image has found its way into the text of the Qur'an in the famous passage of Sūrah 24, appropriately called *An-Nūr*, "The Light":

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.  
 The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp.  
 The lamp is in a glass.  
 The glass is as it were a shining star.  
 [This lamp is] kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself); though no fire touched it ...<sup>8</sup>

Not only the light at the niche of an ascetic's cell, but also the ascetic's own devout life of prayer, otherworldliness, charity, fear as well as hopeful anticipation of the day of judgement, are exalted in the subsequent verses of the same surah:

[This lamp is found] in houses which Allah hath allowed to be exalted and that His name shall be remembered therein. Therein do offer praise to Him at morn and evening.

Men whom neither merchandise nor sale beguileth from remembrance of Allah and constancy in prayer and paying to the poor their due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned;

That Allah may reward them with the best of what they did, and increase reward for them of His bounty. Allah giveth blessings without stint to whom He will.<sup>9</sup>

p. 22. The poet is, obviously, impressed by the skill and the technology of the Byzantine builder.

7 F. Nau, "Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai", *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 58–89; and Daniel J. Sahas, "Anastasius of Sinai (c. 640–c. 700) and 'Anastasii Sinaitae' on Islam", in Chapter 11 in this volume, for references.

8 S. 24 (*sūrat al-Nūr*), 35.

9 24: 36–38.

In fact, the passage describes with admiration monastic life and ideals as it does the essential ethos of Islam itself; the way of life of the ideal Muslim *ummah* (or, brotherhood) in which prayer, prostration, repentance, submission to God (*islam*) communal and social responsibility are all common and interwoven. The Byzantine life to which the people of the desert had been exposed was that of monks and anchorites, rather than of the Church. It was the monastery, not the Church, which had closely been observed, admired and inculcated for its quality and ideals and which became the instrument of Christianization of any number of Arabs, and which influenced, if not gave rise to, the earliest Islam.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the rise of Islam the character of an ideal Arab was compared to that of a Christian; presumably of a monk. The Arab poet Zuhair, albeit unjustifiably so, has been taken as a Christian poet. Zuhair's ode is notable for its high moral tone, uncommon in pre-Islamic pagan poetry, while on the other hand humility, devotion, reward and punishment, as well as an absolute dependence upon the providence of God are not only familiar virtues but the staple of monastic ideals and life. Here is one such ode:

Do not conceal from Allah whatever is in you breasts  
hoping it may be hidden; Allah knows whatever is concealed,  
and either it's postponed, and put in a book, and stored away  
for the Day of Reckoning, or it's hastened, and punished betimes.<sup>11</sup>

The monastic literature is replete with stories, expressions, admonitions and teachings on the theme of God's knowing the depth of man's heart and revealing one's innermost intentions. Rightly, therefore, has Arberry pointed to the "startlingly obvious" parallel between these verses and several passages in the Qur'ān. Zuhair lived long enough to meet the Prophet, although himself never converted to Islam.

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10 Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), p. 19. For references to monasticism and monasteries in Arabia, see pp. 383–4, n. 124; and p. 421, n.15. See also his, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989), 153–54, 191–96, 405–9, 524–26, and in passim. See also J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London: Longman, 1979). From the extensive bibliography on earliest Islam and Christianity I select the still valuable work of Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968), and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians. An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

11 Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*, p. 23.

But what is the deeper cause and experience which make earliest Islam and Christian asceticism congenial to each other? This should not be sought in some common literary or institutional source; the inherent bond between Christian asceticism and earliest Islam must be sought in the desert, that unique environmental reality, force, and context which wroughts a certain type of personality, character, ideals, and expressions of faith and conduct.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the main objection of most Muslims during the Umayyad period (661–750) which gave rise to the movement of Muslim ascetics and eventually to sufism, was that the Umayyads secularized caliphs of Damascus had lost the spirit of the *Rashidūn*, or the first four “Righteous” caliphs, and especially of Muhammad. The transfer of the capital of the Muslim community from the desert city of Medina to the cosmopolitan city of Damascus was for them symptomatic of this decline in piety.<sup>13</sup> The third/ninth century mystic al-Kharrāz gives a telling report on the holiness of the *Rashidūn* in comparison to the Ummayyads:

Abū Bakr did not lift his head on account of the fact that the entire world came to him in abasement, or make any pretensions; “he wore a single garment, which he used to pin together, so that he was known as the ‘man of the two pins’”. ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb, who also ruled the world in its entirety, lived on bread and olive-oil; his clothes were patched in a dozen places, some patches being of leather ... As for ‘Uthman, he was like one of his slaves in dress and appearance ... ‘Ali bought a waistband for four dirhams and a shirt for five dirhams; finding the sleeve of his garment too long, he went to a cobbler and taking his knife cut off the sleeve level with the tips of his fingers ...<sup>14</sup>

Not only Islam but earliest Christianity and Christian asceticism itself are inherently related to the desert. The life of the father of Christian anchorite monasticism St. Anthony is related to desert, Arabs and caravans. It was an Arab, or “Saracen”, caravan which took St. Anthony, already in his sixties, to a three day journey into the wilderness to a lonely oasis at a mountain’s foot

12 Cf. also ch. CXLVIII (3036 A). In another context, Christoph von Schönborn (*Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972, p. 21) attributes the strong sense of the incarnation and the resurrection found in the Palestinian monasticism to its own conditions and experiences!

13 Cf. A.J. Arberry, *Sufism. An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950), p. 32.

14 *Kitāb al-Sidq* (tr. Arberry), quoted by Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 32

towards the Red Sea.<sup>15</sup> A number of stories in the *Leimon*<sup>16</sup> of John Moschus' (ca. 550–619) exalt the desert as the place of spiritual *ascesis*, speak critically of those of light heart who abandon the desert for the comforts of city life, and praise those who return again to the desert after they had abandoned it. One of the most interesting of such stories exalting the virtues of the desert is that of Fileremos (meaning literally “Lover of the desert” and a made up name for the hero of the story) a former anchorite who after returning to the city discovers its spiritual dryness and admits to himself: “Φιλέρημος εἰς πόλιν βαῖν οὐ λαμβάνει” – “A friend of the desert can not expect to receive the gift of a neophyte palm leave in the city!”<sup>17</sup> Islam as a whole, and earliest Islam in particular, is the product of the desert, in the broad sense of the word; so is Christianity in general and Christian monasticism in particular. Hans Lietzmann has aptly remarked of the earliest Christian centuries, that

... an ascetic conception of Christianity such as spread at an early date in the Orient ... required celibacy from all baptized persons. In the 4th c., that was the ideal in Syria. Alternatively, *only the ascetics were regarded as Christians in the full sense*. At bottom this [celibacy] was the view of the hermits and monks of the whole world in ancient times.<sup>18</sup>

15 Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* ch. 49, PG 26:913B–916A.

16 The *Leimon*, in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* as *Pratum Spirituale*, vol. 87.3, 2852A–3112B. French translation by M.J. Rouët de Journel, *Le Pré spirituel* (Paris, 1946, 2nd ed. 1960); Italian translation by R. Maisano, *Il Prato* (Naples, 1982); John Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschus* (Kalamazoo, MI 1992). For a detailed study of the ms editions and translations of the *Leimon*, see Henry Chadwick “John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist” in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982, # xviii). See also N.H. Baynes, “The ‘Pratum spirituale’”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 13(1974)404–14. Th. Nissen has published additional stories not found in Migne's edition. “Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1938) 351–376.

17 Chapter CLII, PG 87.3: 3017 A–C.

18 *A History of the Early Church*, tr. B. L. Woolf, vol. 2, pp. 86–7. Emphasis is ours. Cf. also 285–7, 315–6, 296–8, 197–8. 265–98, 197–8, 265–7, Cf. also vol. 1, pp. 260, 204–5, 170–2, 153. That the monastic-ascetic spirit had penetrated and seemed to identify Christianity is manifested by the efforts of several Fathers of the Church (e.g. St. Basil, Chrysostom and others) to bridge the gap between the ascetics and those who were advocating a more materialistic approach to life. Cf., for example, the conflict between those worldly and culturally oriented and those of monastic-ascetic orientation on the issue of rebuilding cities in Cyprus destroyed after the earthquakes of the fourth century. Costas P. Kyrris “Cypriot Ascetics and the Christian Orient”, *Byzantine Domos* (Athens) 1(1987)95–108, at 96–7. Cf. also his *History of Cyprus with an Introduction to the Geography of Cyprus* (1985, Nicocles eds.) 162–5.

Monasticism found a fertile soil in the desert and ardent supporters and admirers among the Arabs. St. Symeon the Stylite the Younger, the sixth-century Antiochian stylite, an Arab by race, was flocked mostly by desert Arabs who wanted to witness to his quaint but saintly life of devotion.<sup>19</sup> “We can well believe”, observes Bell, “that these pillar saints ... did arouse the curiosity of the primitive-minded people of the desert, that they came to see and that they carried back with them some report of what they had seen and heard”.<sup>20</sup> It is not, therefore, coincidental that when Muhammad wanted to point to his fellow Muslims those whom they “wilt find the nearest in affection”, he pointed to them “those who ... say: Lo! We are Christians”; and the explanation that he gave for that was, because “there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud”.<sup>21</sup> Christian monks were “*muslims*”, or “submitted ones” in the seminal sense of the word. Humility and submission to God is the characteristic and the manifestation of the natural (*fitri*) condition and relationship between humans and God which makes a person a *muslim* without necessarily becoming a member of the Muslim community. For Islam it is this humility and submission which creates the fundamental bond between itself and monasticism. Therefore, if Muhammad was to search for a contemporary example of an ideal “*muslim*” (Abraham is, of course, the example *par excellence*), he would not have to go far away; Christian asceticism was known and prevalent in the Arabian landscape and culture during his time. Such a mode of life was characteristic neither among the Jews nor the pagans; it was a characteristic, however, of the Syro-Palestinian and Egyptian Christianity and of Arabian Christian asceticism. Monasticism was a presence in the region with a culture of its own, congenial to the culture of the Arab nomads.

Seeing monasticism as a paradigmatic way of life, Islam was attracted and penetrated by its ideals, leaving only celibacy aside. However, given the radical changes which Islam brought to sexual relations and the essentially puritan spirit governing its sexual code,<sup>22</sup> one may say that monasticism did, indeed, influence the ethos of earliest Islam and on this score. The Qurʾān and earliest Islam are distinctly more moderate, and even puritanical, compared to the pre-Islamic Arabian norms, as the romantic poetry of the *jahilliya* shows. As far as the values of social responsibility of monasticism are concerned, namely

19 Symeon Stylites the Younger (BHG 1689); ed. P. van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de s. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1962–70).

20 Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 19.

21 Surah 5 (*Al-Mā'idah*), 82.

22 On sexuality in Islam see, Bousquet, G.-H., *La morale de l'Islam et son éthique sexuelle* (Paris, 1957) and *L'Éthique sexuelle de l'Islam* (Paris: Mouton, 1966); and especially Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

hospitality and care for the needy, the widows and the orphans of which Muhammad had a personal experience from his early life, Islam not simply upheld and made them part of God's own word, the Qur'ān,<sup>23</sup> but made charity (*zakāt*) one of the five "pillars" of Islam!

Even when the Qur'ān appears to be critical of monks, such a criticism is not directed towards monasticism itself but rather towards ordinary individuals who have deviated from the submission to God alone and have taken rabbis and monks "as lords beside Allah".<sup>24</sup> This criticism, however, is consistent with the basic preoccupation of Islam with the unity and uniqueness of God (*tawhīd*) and man's duty to be obedient to God alone. Indirectly this criticism constitutes an acknowledgement of the power of monasticism and of the influence monks were able to exercise upon the populace – a power which, according to the Qur'ān, many monks had exploited.<sup>25</sup> A similar kind of criticism is levelled against Christians in general who have exalted Jesus as God, although the Qur'ān is most respectful of Jesus himself. It is in this vein of thought that one must read what constitutes perhaps the most direct attack of the Qur'ān against monasticism where God is renouncing monasticism:

... We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, [in the footsteps of the prophets] and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who follow him. But monasticism they [the Christians] invented – We ordained it not for them – only seeking Allah's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance".<sup>26</sup>

But, again, in this passage monasticism is implicitly acknowledged as a way through which monks have chosen to please God through their devotion to Jesus. What is condemned here is the devotion offered to Jesus instead to God alone. This is a late Medinan surah whose content and language reflect the growing disagreement of Islam with Christianity and its distance from the Christian community. Misguided monasticism is criticised because "many of the [Jewish] rabbis and the [Christian] monks devour the wealth of mankind wantonly and debar [men] from the way of Allah".<sup>27</sup> One may want to note at this point the twofold characteristics of Islam, submission to God and charity as an expression of brotherhood and solidarity among all believers, which

23 Cf surah 93 (*Ad-Duhā*), 9–11, and compare this, for example, to John Moschus' *Leimon*, chs 24, 136, 140.

24 Surah 9 (*At-Taubah*), 31.

25 Surah 9:34.

26 Surah 57 (*Al-Hadid*), 27.

27 Surah 9 (*At-Taubah*), 34.

are also the characteristics of monastic life. It is in faithfulness to these ideals and under the light of and in response to misguided monasticism that one may want to see the modifications which Islam brought about to the otherwise ideal way of life (meaning, monasticism): opening up the life of submission (*islam*) to the community at large and making it a personal responsibility and a way of life for all, thus creating a “democracy of married monks”.

Muhammad’s own encounters with Christian monks occurred, as narrated in the hagiographical *Sirat* or *vita* of Muhammad, at the most crucial turns of his early life and of his life as a prophet. Particular narratives, as all hagiological accounts, may be subjected to historical criticism and found lacking in historicity; but the general evidence they provide remains intact, that third/ninth-century Muslims, confronting Byzantine polemicists rejecting the prophethood of Muhammad, endeavoured to present Muhammad comparable to Jesus in words, miracles<sup>28</sup> and deeds, and proclaimed as a prophet by most reliable Christian exponents. Interestingly enough, these exponents are invariably monks and hermits! The stories of Bahira and Waraqah, which have survived in the Muslim tradition as testimonies of Muhammad’s prophethood based upon Christian scriptures ascertained by these devout monks, are too well-known to be repeated here.<sup>29</sup> What may be of special interest is that the methodology and the issues used in these narratives find almost exact equivalent in monastic sources. Thus, signs which prefigure and attest to the excellence of Muhammad find precedents certainly in the gospels but more congenial ones in the monastic literature. In the *Narrations* of Anastasius Sinaites the excellence of John of the “Ladder”, abbot of the monastery of Sinai, is presented as having been prefigured by various miraculous signs and incidents.<sup>30</sup> According to the *Leimon*, in the bitter Monophysite-Chalcedonian controversy, one of the often repeated evidence as to which side is right, it is which side can perform more miracles.<sup>31</sup> It has been said, for example, that a heretical bishop of Cyzicus with his prayers made an olive tree to move.<sup>32</sup> Among the miracles attributed to Muhammad, and recorded by Ibn Sa’d

28 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “The formation of later Islamic doctrines as a response to Byzantine polemics: The miracles of Muhammad”. See Chapter 4 in this volume. Other miracles of Muhammad have also their equivalent in miracles by monks. Compare, for example, the story of Zainab and the poisoned lamb after Muhammad’s attack on Khaybar, with chapter 94 of the *Leimon*.

29 *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ishāq’s Sirat Rasūl Allāh*, with Introduction and Notes by A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 79–82, and 104–7.

30 Cf. F. Nau, “Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai”, *Oriens Christianus*, 2(1902) Nos. XXXIV, XXXII, XV, VII, VI, V, IV.

31 Cf. *Leimon*, e.g. chs. 147, 148, and others.

32 Anastasius Sinaites, *Questiones*, 20, PG 89:519–25.

(764–845) in his *Kitāb at-Tabaqāt* (Book of Classes), a number of them are of trees and stones moved by the prayer or the command of the prophet.<sup>33</sup> The story also of the young Muhammad and of the monk Bahira finds an almost exact equivalent in ch. 34 of Palladius' (d. ca. 431) *The Lausaic History*.<sup>34</sup> An elderly monk Piterūm who came to meet a most virtuous nun senses that she was not in a crowd. When a woman, despised by everybody as crazy, was brought in front of him he recognized her as the virtuous nun by the "crown" of which an angel had revealed to him in a dream that she would wear; the "crown" was nothing else but a rug on her head. In the *Sīrat* story the monk Bahira senses that a prophet was among the bedouins to whom he was offering hospitality. When he questioned them if there was anybody else in their company they thought of the young Muhammad whom they had left outside to attend to the camels. Brought inside the cell Bahira immediately recognized Muhammad as the expected prophet from a sign at the back of his neck.<sup>35</sup>

Much more needs to be studied and said about the content of the Qur'ān and especially of the *Sīrat* under the light of contemporary monastic literature as a way of understanding the ethos and praxis of earliest Islam. Even more can be said about monastic praxis and culture and earliest Islam in terms of manners, dress code, vigils, sobriety and abstention from wine, use of sand for purification, liturgical formulas, the prayer mat, the call to prayer, and many more expressions which point directly to monastic ways and practices. As an example we will mention briefly the five daily prayers. Prayer is the quintessence of Islam, punctuating and encompassing the daily life of a believer.<sup>36</sup> Without its ritual prayer, Islam remains unmanifested and its claim and profession as a religion of "submission" hardly demonstrable. Prayer, too, is the quintessence of monasticism. Monasticism without prayer is a misnomer. Looking at the five daily prayers in Islam one can immediately discern the daily canon of the monastery rather than of the church which Islam most likely has adopted rather than of the synagogue, as Goitein has maintained.<sup>37</sup> The Qur'ān specifies two daily prayers, in the morning and in the evening, and possibly "in some watches of the night".<sup>38</sup> During the Medinan times a third prayer was

33 Tr. in Arthur Jeffery ed., *A Reader on Islam* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962), 309–30; and Sahas, "The Formation", 314–5.

34 Ed. C. Butler, 2 vols. in 1 (Cambridge, 1898–1904).

35 Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 79–81.

36 On prayer especially in the Qur'ān, see S.D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), ch. 3, "Prayer in Islam", pp. 73–89 with reference to his unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *Das Gebet im Qur'ān* (Frankfurt, 1923).

37 "Prayer in Islam", pp. 74–5.

38 In fact, prayer in the evening and recital of the Qur'ān in the morning (17:78); 18:29, 11:114, 30:17.



introduced, *as-salāt al wusta*, probably for the middle of the day and probably meaning the best among all forms of prayer, which by some authorities is the *ʿasr*, or afternoon prayer.<sup>39</sup> Yet, on the point of the number of the daily prayers the Muslim practice has exceeded even the very word of God, the Qurʾān. Nowhere does the Qurʾān refer explicitly to five daily prayers, although their number may be deduced from a rather imaginative reading of various passages. Thus, *Ar-Rūm*, surah 30: 17–18 reads:

So glory be to Allah when ye enter *the night* and when ye enter *the morning* – Unto Him be praise in the heavens and the earth! – and at *the sun's decline* and in *the noonday*.

*Al-Baraqaḥ* also, surah 2:238, reads, “Be guardians of your prayers [in the plural, not in the dual], and of the midmost prayer, and stand up with devotion to Allah”. This, Goitein has suggested, makes for five prayers. Even not directly Qurʾānic, the five daily prayers had already become mandatory during the lifetime of the Prophet. Given Muhammad’s traditional affinity with ascetics, it is not at all unjustifiable to assume that the five daily prayers, interacted with prostrations (two at dawn, four at noon and mid-afternoon, three in the evening and four at night), are a direct transplantation of a practice common in the Christian East, especially in the monastic canon.<sup>40</sup> In the words of Simon Jargy,

Les cinq prières canoniques accompagnés de génuflexions, de prosternations, voire de larnes, sont celles-là mêmes gestes – et ce jusqu’à nos jours – dans les offices canoniques des jacobites, chaldéens, nestoriens, éthiopiens.

Jargy notes also that,

La plupart de ces pratiques sont encore conservées dans les ordres religieux contemplatifs d’Occident, bien qu’elles aient été édulcorées.<sup>41</sup>

Even Goitein, who does not ordinarily ascribe things to Eastern Christianity but looks for Judaic characteristics into Islam, admits at this point that

39 Surah 2 (*Al-Baraqaḥ*), 238 “Be guardians of your prayers, and of the midmost prayer, and stand up with devotion to Allah”; and 24 (*An-Nūr*), 58.

40 The five daily prayers, called “Hours”, are the First at 6:00 a.m., the Third at 9:00 a.m., the Sixth at 12:00 noon, the Ninth at 3:00 p.m., and the Twelfth at 6:00 p.m.

41 Simon Jargy, *Islam et chrétienté. Les fils d’Abraham entre la confrontation et le dialogue* (Paris: Publications orientalistes de France, 1981), p. 95.

Seeing that the liturgical elements contained in the Koran are almost in their entirety derived from the services of the Eastern Church and the Synagogue, it is feasible to seek an answer to our question [why five?] in Muhammad's relationship to the two older monotheistic religions.<sup>42</sup>

Goitein goes no further than this general observation. It seems to us, however, that the number five and the time of the daily prayers can be related more directly to the *Hours*, or to the daily *acolouthiae* of the monastic typicon, the *mesonycticon* (the middle of the night service), the *orthros* (the matins, or dawn service), the *hours*, the *vespers* (the evening prayers) and the *apodeipnon* (the after dinner prayers). Goitein's explanation that, as the Qur'ān speaks of Islam as "a middle nation" (2: 143) it is possible that the number five represents a "middle position" between the Jewish *three* daily prayers and the Christian [meaning Syriac monastic prayers] of *seven*, is highly conjectural, especially given the direct evidence of the monastic typicon, and in view of the fact that the night prayers or vigils – not found in Judaism – are the favourite ones in both, asceticism<sup>43</sup> and earliest Islam.

The comparative study of earliest Islam with Christian monasticism does not compromise nor does it dilute the identity or autonomy of Islam; it rather explains its primordial and essential character. It also enlightens for us the influence of monasticism and the role it played in the evolution of the religious and cultural experience of the Middle East. In the end, the study of Eastern Christian asceticism and monasticism may be proven to be a more congenial path of approaching Islam and understanding it as a phenomenon, and thus the best means of balancing eccentric, negative and distorted approaches and images of Islam and Christianity created mutually about each other's religion.

The monastic sources contemporary to the rise of Islam provide a significant reservoir of information on the historical, cultural and spiritual context in which Islam came into being; as contemporary Muslim sources also, particularly pre-Islamic poetry, the Qur'ān, the *Sīrat* and the Hadith constitute a body of literature which allows insights into the kind and the state of monasticism<sup>44</sup> prior to and during the rising of Islam.

42 "Prayer in Islam", p. 84.

43 Cf. *Leimon*, chs. 146, 152.

44 Cf. S. Svirī, "Wā-rahbānīyatan ibtada'ūhā: An analysis of traditions concerning the origin and evaluation of Christian monasticism" in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 13(1990–91).

# The Art and Non-Art of Byzantine Polemics: Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine Anti-Islamic Literature

## 1 Introduction

Although we have not yet identified and studied fully the entire Byzantine literature on Islam, we do need to take a break in the study of this huge subject,<sup>1</sup> in order to take stock of and reflect on some recurring motivations and patterns of dialogue and polemics. Such patterns, although not absolutely and rigidly adhered to, must be noted by the researcher. What is, then, the redeeming value of such an investigation? It is the recognition that Byzantine polemics were neither inconsequential of, nor irrelevant to, the Byzantine ethos and its tradition, nor did they arise in a vacuum each time. The Byzantines did not develop a monolithic approach to Islam; they developed rather a variety of attitudes, depending on regional political realities, reflective of the personal, cultural, and contextual circumstances in which each writer was found. Byzantine attitudes towards Islam were developed from the Byzantine grass-roots, rather than from the Byzantine administration. One may want to generalize, not without foundation, that Byzantine polemics were developed as a response to whatever kind of Islam was experienced – military, political, theological, practical and spiritual – at a given time. The polemic anti-Islamic literature produced, therefore, bears all the signs of a spontaneous reaction to such experiences.

Excluded from our consideration in this study are narratives, chronicles and historical material. Such writings deal with Islam in the context of the development of Christian history; they do not aim at refuting Islam, although indirectly they may serve to do so.<sup>2</sup> Of similar nature are references or whole writings, contemporary to the earliest Arab invasions, which in a sermonic context describe the reaction of the Christian population to the Muslim

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1 Several general surveys on Byzantine-Muslim relations already exist: Güterbock, Vasiliev, Sdrakas, Meyendorff, Vryonis (“Islam”) and Khoury, to mention but a few.

2 See, for example, Theophanes.

conquests.<sup>3</sup> Such are the sermons of Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> His narratives of the conquest of the Holy Land are interesting, in the sense that they reflect the sentiments of the Christian populations about the conquests and help to explain, to some degree, the historical and emotional background behind the writings of later Byzantine polemicists. Chronicles and chroniclers of events (and there are many of these) present a rather narrowly-focused view of Byzantine-Muslim relations.

Written around the activities of some ruling institution, caliphs, emperors and sultans concentrate on the political affairs undertaken by or relevant to the history of that particular institution, and rarely note things that happened or activities that were going on elsewhere. Their standard of reference was what may be called the “official level,” the level of matters that interested official circles or affected their working.<sup>5</sup>

What interested official circles the most was the outcome of warfare between the two religious communities/empires; a preoccupation which in itself gives a distorted overall picture of Byzantine-Muslim relations. In the words of Hamilton Gibb,

The wars between Islam and Byzantium occupy so prominent, indeed almost exclusive, a place in our history books and in the chronicles on which they draw, that the student of medieval history may be excused for taking the rubric “Arab-Byzantine Relations” as a record of little more than continual warfare.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, history books and chronicles do report warfare relations almost exclusively. But for our subject not all history books and chronicles are primary sources, or the only sources. What does one do, for example, with the *Sermon on St. Barbarus*<sup>7</sup> or with the *Sermon of Gregory Decapolites*,<sup>8</sup> two “historical” sermons which shed little light on history but do enlighten the mystical and spiritual disposition of their authors?

3 On this topic see Kaegi, and Constantelos.

4 See Sophronius “Christmas” (AD 634), and Sophronius “Epiphany” (AD 637).

5 Gibb, p. 221.

6 Ibid.

7 See Contantine Acropol., pp. 405-20, the story of a ninth-century Arab soldier who hides in the mountains, converts to Christianity, is killed accidentally by a hunter and becomes known as “St. Barbarus” (that is, a “barbarian saint!”), as his real name never became known.

8 Sahas, “Dekapolites”. See Chapter 23 in this volume.

## 2 The Setting of Byzantine Refutations

It was the military defeat of Byzantines at the hands of Arab armies that made Islam and anyone related to it an enemy of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>9</sup> It was also the progressively Persian-Shiite twist that made Islam, in the eyes of later Byzantines, look like an entity similar to Latin Christendom for which Byzantines had little respect.

The geographical and cultural proximity of Byzantine Christianity to Islam must always be borne in mind when dealing with the relations between the two traditions. Among the Christians of the East<sup>10</sup> many, and prominent ones, were Arabs. Within the general framework of Byzantine polemics we must distinguish between those who were under Muslim rule and in direct contact with Islam, and those outside Muslim rule but “dealing” with Islam across political, cultural and linguistic borders. The speech of the latter was indirect, their tone freer and often violent, their arguments largely misinformed or groundless, and the purpose of their writings mainly for internal consumption.<sup>11</sup> One may want to mention here Nicetas of Byzantium (ca. 842–912), George Hamartolos (9th century), Arethas of Caesarea (ca. 850–after 932), Euthymios Zygabenos (1050–1120), Nicetas Choniates (ca. 1150–1213), Demetrios Cydones (ca. 1324–ca. 1400) and Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425).

For the majority of eastern Christians earliest Islam contained significant elements of Christian teaching, albeit heretical. Thus, the pervasive attitude of Arab-Byzantine Christians (the name Arab used here in its broad generic meaning) towards Islam was an attitude towards a phenomenon basically congenial, although strange and possibly irritating. The question of co-existence, however, was never raised in the minds of these Byzantines. What was to be defeated was Islam as a superstition, false teaching and heresy; not as a community of people, or a nation. The Muslims were, after all, Arabs as many Christians were, too. Islam was to be fought as a false Christology, one of several such heresies that were still prevailing even after the doctrinal definitions of

9 The iconoclastic Council of Constantinople (AD 754) condemned John of Damascus for his friendly relations with the Arab Muslims as “conspirator against the empire.” Mansi, vol. 13 (1767), p. 356D. See also Sahas, *John*, pp. 3 ff.

10 On this point I would like to suggest that one needs to differentiate between the Byzantine Orthodox and the Nestorian or monophysite writings on Islam. The latter form, in several ways, a different genre of polemics; and this because of the particular theology, or rather Christology, as well as political and historical realities that these writings represent. On the early Nestorian and monophysite relations to Islam, see Moorhead “Earliest” and Moorhead “Response.”

11 Gaudeul, pp. 61–3.

Ecumenical Councils; like iconoclasm (726–843), which was actually a movement with roots going deep into the earliest years of Islam, and extending into the period of a well-established Muslim caliphate.<sup>12</sup> Islam was, therefore, to be fought from within and on its own ground. In the Arab-Byzantine context, Islam was to be fought with the indigenous means available, namely speech, writing, logical “suffocation” and suppression, cultural and community insulation; not war. Hence in essence, the dialectic, hermeneutical, comparative, politico-diplomatic, theological, pastoral, hagiological-spiritual nature of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature.<sup>13</sup>

In many respects Islam developed parallel lines along those of Byzantine (Orthodox) Christianity. Orthodox Christianity and Islam mirror each other in many ways.<sup>14</sup> Not only several significant experiences were the same, but several developments were also contemporary. For example, in both cultures a theocratic role was developed for the emperor and the caliph. In both traditions a conciliar or democratic process for defining orthodoxy can be observed, on almost identical issues and order. In both traditions the process towards a theological self-understanding resulted in a triumph of orthodoxy; in the case of Byzantium culminating in the victory of the iconophiles over the iconoclasts, and in the case of Islam in the victory of the Ash‘arites over the Mu‘tazilites on the issue of the created or uncreated Qur‘ān. Considering the opposite stand of each religious tradition on the issues of the icons or the Qur‘ān, their theological stance is phenomenologically identical. It has to do with the reality of God’s revelation in a way that pertains to both, the physical and the spiritual, the human and the divine; “two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” – to use, only for the sake of language, the wording of the Christological Definition of Chalcedon (451) – without asking to explain revelation by mere logic (*bilā kayfa*). In the frame of mind revealed by these latter words one must discern a principle that permeates both Byzantine Christian and Islamic ethos, from which different answers stem on the distinct questions which each religious tradition raises. This principle of meaning in antinomy and unity in diversity is perhaps one of the most significant points of convergence between essential Christianity and essential Islam. The recognition of and appreciation for such a principle calls

12 See the introduction and the relevant literature on the subject in Sahas *Icon*.

13 Meyendorff (p. 115) has already identified four categories of writings: polemic literature, canonical and liturgical texts, official letters sent by Byzantine dignitaries to their Muslim counterparts, hagiographical material. These categories, however, do not reflect the equivalent content and nature of the polemics.

14 See Vaporis, particularly Haddad “Eastern,” pp. 17–32 therein.

for a re-examination of the development of two religious traditions in their classical stages.

Byzantine polemics, therefore, must be examined in the context of such an engagement and disengagement of the one tradition from the other; it is in this context that one should attempt to discern “patterns” of refutation.

### 3 A War of Words against Islam

To repeat, the history of relations between Byzantium and Islam is, generally speaking, a history of warfare; and there is little “art” in warfare as such. What art there is could be determined in terms of timing, techniques, clarity of goals and by any tangible result derived from it. The anti-Islamic literature is a part and a by-product of the state of war between the two theocratic communities. The Byzantine polemics constitute also a war of words. Although this broad statement is essentially correct, it is not absolutely accurate. The Umayyad period presents some unique characteristics. Arabic-speaking Syrian and North African Christians had grown tired of Greek-Byzantine hegemony and especially of taxes imposed upon them. The long protracted Byzantine-Persian wars had also exhausted these populations. Islam, then, represented to Arab Christians a possibility of manifestation of an Arab solidarity as an alternative to a Greek-speaking Byzantine authority. The Arab conquests were viewed introspectively as a punishment of God for the iniquities of the Christians themselves. Thus, the earliest polemics were heresiological in character, aiming not so much against the Arabs as a political power, but rather against Islam as a Christian heresy.

Byzantine Christians living under Muslim rule did not necessarily take the designation *dhimmi* as an honorary title that distinguished them from other conquered nations, not only because Byzantium was in itself an empire, but mainly because it was a Christian empire. Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, contains all the theological ingredients needed for survival as a unique entity, even if defeated or in a state of conquest, ingredients which allow little room for sharing in a religious pluralism, but which also make such a pluralism possible! The political and military losses of the empire were not considered in effect as actual and permanent losses, but rather as temporary divine signs of divine providence for the good of the Christian community. In a religious tradition, where crucifixion and resurrection are central characteristics and beliefs, there is little room for compromise, acceptance of final defeat and subjugation. Furthermore, for the Byzantines Islam did not represent a superior way of life, or a higher state of religion, as Islam was seeing itself,

but a downgrading of civilization and a superstitious distorted faith. If anything, the designation *dhimmīs* reminded the Christians of that which they ought to merely tolerate and eventually reject; thence, the proud and calculated polemics against Islam. To those who were not under direct Arab rule, the posture was one of open warfare, political and military. One can imagine the indignation of Byzantine authorities, especially those living in the capital, at Christians like John of Damascus who had regular dealings with the Muslims, maintained a friendship, carried on a dialogue with them and even served in their administration.

Yet it was under Byzantine influence, particularly of the *dhimmīs* “that the caliphate was first imperialized, a process commenced by the Umayyads, and later completed by the Abbasids who Iranized it.”<sup>15</sup> The influence of the Byzantine *dhimmīs* extended to various significant aspects of art and culture in the life of the caliphate, as well as upon the administrative, political and economic fields. Through the polemic literature, the *dhimmīs* influenced the intellectual, theological fabric of Islam still in its infancy. Given this strong show of independent mind of the *dhimmīs*, the mosque only partially replaced the church, while the substructure remained Byzantine. One can say that Byzantium was not destroyed by the earliest conquests, but it survived in an Arabized and Islamized form, as a “neo-Byzantine empire.”<sup>16</sup> Thence the early Umayyad period is not only an example in the art of co-existence, but also a phenomenon of transformation of a society from within. A growing awareness of being a unique society, distinct from the Byzantine, prompted the later Umayyads, beginning with ‘Abd al-Malik (684–705), and especially the Abbasids, to ascertain their own identity as a theocratic empire.

Why, then, the vehement attack against Islam? Precisely because in the context of the Arab-Byzantine-Christian culture, the new, strange and dangerous element was Islam itself, not the Arabs.<sup>17</sup> Thence the turning of Arab Christians

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15 Vryonis “Islam,” p. 211.

16 Vryonis “Islam,” p. 223.

17 The wars of the Byzantines against the Arabs are a later phenomenon. While, for example, Heraclius fought personally against the Persians, he did not do so against the Arabs. Heraclius took no real part in a fighting against the Arabs. The earliest wars of the Byzantines against Islam were left to the local Christian populations; these were mostly wars of words. One reason for Heraclius’ distance from the Arabs might have been his antipathy towards the Monophysites and the anti-Chalcedon Syrians; an antipathy that was mutual. In Edessa, for example, Heraclius was refused communion by Metropolitan Isaiah for not anathematizing the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo (Michael the Syrian, vol. 2, p. 412). In Mabboug, where the Chalcedonians predominated, Heraclius clashed with the citizens of the city over the question of the one will in Christ (*ibid.*). They were anti-Nestorians, but adhered to the doctrine of the two wills in Christ. Heraclius



not against the religion of the Arabs, but against the heresy of dubious Arabs, “the Ishmaelites,” the sons of the concubine Hagar, those without the blessing of Sarah, the legitimate wife of Abraham. At this point one is reminded of the playful distortion of the name “Saracens” to “Sarracens” by John of Damascus and his ingeniously and perilously imaginative derogatory interpretation of its etymology.<sup>18</sup> For the earliest Arab-Byzantine-polemists the “Arab” ingredient represents the element of continuity, while Islam represents the element of abnormality and, thus, the need of conversion. It must also be borne in mind that the Byzantine attitude towards Islam was, certainly, shaped by the Muslim attitude towards Byzantium; an attitude that called for the replacement of the Roman-Christian by an Arab-Muslim empire.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4 Theological Treatment of Islam

Byzantines in general were experienced theologians. The long history of theological debates had made them experts in dialectics. With regard to Islam most of them failed to discern the essential point and motivation of the Muslim doctrine, but others succeeded in pointing with precision to key theological differences. John of Damascus (ca. 652–749) for example, discerned more correctly than most other writers the Arian rather than the Nestorian influence

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pillaged the houses and the churches of those who did not profess the Monothelite doctrine, and persecuted their priests and monks. Michael the Syrian sees these persecutions as one of the causes for the successful Arab conquests (ibid. pp. 412–13). The Syrians actually supported the Arabs in their battles against Heraclius. Under these circumstances, it would have made little sense for Heraclius to have fought actively against the Arabs.

- 18 Christides (p. 331) has erroneously concluded that “A Byzantine explanation of the origin of Saracen which has escaped the attention of modern scholars is found in the 15th-century Byzantine author Georgios Phrantzes who asserts that the Arabs were called *Sarakēnoi* because they were sent out by Sarah devoid of inheritance and empty-handed.” Actually, seven centuries before Phrantzes, John of Damascus had already introduced this distorted name and had suggested this derogatory interpretation (Sahas *John*, pp. 70–1).
- 19 Islam became known to the Byzantines during the Arab invasions. There is no reference to Islam in Byzantine literature during the life of Muḥammad and the caliphate of Abū Bakr (632–34). Islam was simply an internal event in Arabia that affected none other than the Arab tribes of Arabia themselves. Even the Qur’ān supports this statement. Only in later suras does the notion that Islam is a religion for all mankind appear; otherwise Islam is presented as an Arab proclamation of the belief in one God. With the fall of Jerusalem and the rest of Syria, the war between “the race of the Ishmaelites” and the “Romans” began (Zonaras, vol. 134, col. 1288). The goal was the conquest of Constantinople itself; the capital of the Christian Roman (Byzantine) empire. For references, see Sahas, *John*, pp. 20–21.

and character of Islamic Christology.<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Mysticos (901–7, 912–25) also made an insightful distinction in revelation between “divine decree” in Islam and “divine presence” in Christianity.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand Arethas of Caesarea (ca. 850–932) was unable to communicate with Islam or notice its spiritual values and eschatological concerns. For him Islam was a crude materialistic, hedonistic way of life which would be perpetuated in the hereafter and would pollute Paradise.<sup>22</sup> Arethas grossly misunderstood Muslim eschatology that points to the spiritualization of the human body rather than to the materialization of Paradise.<sup>23</sup>

The theological treatment of Islam included, of course, another dimension. Islam was not viewed and judged on the basis of general theological-philosophical criteria, but with Christian ideas and standards. One can understand this posture if one takes into account the encompassing role of Christianity in the whole theocratic life of Byzantium. A Muslim had no chance of being seen as anything else but as a “non-Christian.” What identified a Muslim was not Islam itself but his being a non-Christian, or perhaps an anti-Christian.

The Christian character of polemics prompted also the Muslims to use Christian categories and arguments, which resulted at times in a Christianization of Islam and an Islamization of Christianity. I have in mind here the technique of using miracles as a “proof” of prophethood for either Jesus or Muḥammad.<sup>24</sup> The Muslim response to the Christian posture on the superiority of Jesus because of his miracles was the embellishment of Muḥammad’s life with miracles in order to match those of Jesus. In the practical life also the office of the caliph was shaped into one of a theocratic ruler that resembled the role of a Byzantine emperor: if a caliph would not look and behave like a Byzantine emperor, no Byzantine would take his office and authority seriously. Furthermore, the iconoclastic movement on the one hand (726–843) and the Muʿtazilite on the other (750–848), both of them almost contemporary and hostile to anthropomorphism,<sup>25</sup> prompted the interference of the imperial power and that of the caliph to bring about and assert orthodoxy as a criterion of religious and political loyalty.

20 See Sahas “Revisited,” pp. 108–9. See Chapter 18 in this volume.

21 Nicholas Mysticos.

22 Sahas “Arethas,” p. 76. See Chapter 27 in this volume.

23 See, Bouhdiba, pp. 72–87.

24 Sahas “Formation.” The *Sirah*, which coincides chronologically with the open criticism and challenges, especially of John of Damascus and Patriarch Timothy, must be seen as an apologetic response of Islam to Christianity; see Gaudeul, p. 35.

25 Haddad “Iconoclasm,” p. 288.

But this kind of “assimilation” was only temporary and within the context of the Muslim-Christian controversies. Progressively the Muslims became sophisticated in theological matters and knowledgeable in Christian doctrines and arguments. They set themselves to imitate the style of Christian polemics and to free themselves from theological dilemmas. The situation eventually reversed itself when Muslim intellectuals, and especially those with first-hand knowledge of Christianity, took the offensive.<sup>26</sup> The pointed character of Byzantine polemics assisted Islam in formulating its own doctrine more sharply; in the same way as the various Christian heretics contributed to the articulation of Christian orthodoxy. It has been accurately suggested that the Christological controversies, for example, provided the blue-print for the articulation of the Muslim doctrine of the Qurʾān as the word of God.<sup>27</sup>

The goal of Byzantine polemicists to ridicule their opponents, or render them speechless with rhetorical questions, backfired. Such questions were often not answered, not because the Muslims were rendered speechless, but rather because such questions were so obviously and blatantly polemic and sarcastic that the Muslims ignored them with jest.<sup>28</sup> On this point one may want to suggest that the frequency or lack of frequency of a question, or argument found in Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, can be taken as an indicator of the seriousness of a controversy.

## 5 Islam as a Christian Heresy

The typical Christian heresiological technique had always been the exposition of a heresy vis-à-vis the Christian orthodoxy. This was done usually in the form of actual or fictitious dialogues. The same technique was used against Islam. In “dialogues” like those “between a Christian and a Saracen” by John of Damascus, Abū Qurra, Patriarch Timothy,<sup>29</sup> Nicetas of Byzantium, Arethas and others, the Saracen finds himself in a difficult position to defend his faith convincingly under Christian questioning. The Christian treats the Muslim as a Christian and uses his own sources, especially the Bible, as well

26 See for example ‘Ali b. Sahl b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 855), or ‘Amr. b. Bahr al-Jāhīz (d. 869).

27 Seale.

28 See Arethas of Caesarea who asks such a direct question to “the Emir at Damascus”: “But how did you venture to call the faith of the Saracens pure and immaculate ...? Isn’t that a faith full of filth that subjects you mostly to sexual acts with women, and to many other shameful and improper deeds?” Westerink, vol. 1, p. 234, and Sahas “Arethas,” p. 73. See Chapter 27 in this volume.

29 See John *Disputatio* (Kotter, vol. 4, pp. 427–38); John, *Disceptatio*, cols. 1585–97; Abū Qurra, *Contra*, cols. 1461–1596 *passim*; Mingana.

as his Christian way of thinking and arguments, to judge Islam. This approach places the Muslim seemingly in a non-discriminatory, but nevertheless in a disadvantageous position and raises the uncomfortable question of divine intention: if Muslims and Christians pray to the same God, why does He not reveal to Muslims that Jesus is, in fact, His only-begotten Son? But, precisely, because the Byzantines had no such mental difficulty in accepting Islam as a religion that believes in the same God, they treated Islam as a heresy. For the Byzantines, the Muslims knew Christ, but they consciously denied him. The key question of the Byzantines with regard to Islam was not God or his grace, but the Muslim denial of God's revelation in the person of Christ. The heretical, and possibly demonic, element in Islam is to be found not in the ignorance of Christ but in the conscious rejection of him. Thence Islam is the "anti-Christ", and Muḥammad the "forerunner of the anti-Christ."<sup>30</sup> Indirectly, by "Christianizing" Islam the Byzantines contributed to its solidification, and to the legitimization of a war against it.

The disturbing factor about Islam was that Islam, in the minds of the Byzantines, was raising the question of divine providence. To them the question was made even more existential by the fact that the Byzantine Empire was a Christian empire: if the God of Islam is the God of Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus, how then could this same God treat his empire so badly in the hands of the Muslims? That is why this question was met with various, ostensibly contradictory, answers. Either God has chosen the Muslims in order to punish the Christians for their iniquities, or He was showing His love to the Christians by testing their faithfulness to Him. For some Byzantines, like John of Damascus, Arethas and Gregory Palamas, the tribulations of the Christians manifested God's loyalty to them, as He was preparing them for greater achievements and glories. Notwithstanding the question as to who influenced whom in this respect, the Muslims also used this line of logic in reverse and to their own advantage to speak of the superiority of Islam and of the bankruptcy of Christianity; something which shows the mutual understanding of each other that sheds also light into the intensity and bitterness of the conflict. The Muslim conquests<sup>31</sup> and all disasters of the empire were attributed to the wrath of God. When in 1346 the dome of the Church of St. Sophia collapsed, this mishap and even the later fall of Constantinople (1453) were attributed to

30 John *de Haeresibus*, col. 764 (Kotter, vol. 4, pp. 60–67).

31 See the Byzantine authors writing close to the time of the conquests in Kaegi, and Constantelos; for later authors see Arethas, or Palamas in Sahas "Arethas", Sahas "Captivity", and Sahas "Gregory".

the wrath of God.<sup>32</sup> Thus Islam was made to be the scapegoat for political or internal calamities of the empire.

## 6 Diplomacy and Dialogue

On a different level, however, some more diplomatic Byzantines tried not to reject the reality of Islam but to see it in a more positive way, as the power with which the Christian empire had to come to terms and coexist. They attempted to place Islam under the best possible light which Christians can accept. Some polemicists, for example, differentiated Muḥammad himself from the Muslims and their way of life; they tended to acknowledge virtues in Muḥammad, while condemning popular Muslim practices. Timothy, the Nestorian patriarch of Baghdad, in his Apology to the Caliph al-Mahdī conceded that Muḥammad “walked in the path of all the prophets.”<sup>33</sup> Was this a diplomatic move, a sincere statement of conviction, or an expression of timidity on the part of Timothy?<sup>34</sup> Considering the position of those living in a Muslim environment, as well as Timothy’s own criticism of Muḥammad in other instances,<sup>35</sup> such statements do not betray a timid man in Timothy. A reverse approach, noticed even today, called for a blistering attack against Muḥammad and a courteous gesture of friendship towards the Muslims.<sup>36</sup> In both instances the impossible effort was to differentiate and alienate the Muslims from Muḥammad, the prophet of their faith.

A good case of a “diplomat” polemicist is that of Patriarch Nicholas Mysticos (901–7, 912–25). Acting as regent of the under-aged Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Nicholas wrote a letter in 913 to the caliph in Baghdad<sup>37</sup> in support of the mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus to Baghdad, in order to free Cypriot prisoners of war after Damian’s attack on the island (912). Nicholas not only does not antagonize the caliph, but in a diplomatic way he instructs him, as a ruler of a major dynasty, to prove magnanimous towards those who are weaker, meaning the Cypriots. According to Nicholas, the entire world is governed by two sovereign powers, the Saracens and the Romans. These sovereignties, then, should stand above petty frictions, and “maintain only social and

32 See Kariotoglou, p. 60, n.2.

33 Mingana, p. 197.

34 Browne has criticized this kind of overture as an expression of timidity.

35 See Mingana, pp. 169 and 175.

36 Consider Nazir-Ali, pp. 41–2.

37 Nicholas Mysticos, cols. 28–40. For Jenkins (p. 269), the superscription reading “To the most glorious and excellent amir of Crete and beloved one” is a “mere copyist’s blunder.”

brotherly relations and not, because we are different in our way of life, in our professions and in our faiths, be disposed totally in an alien way towards each other and impoverish each other of the communication through letters.”<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to envision how, under circumstances of war between the two empires and with a tradition of controversial literature produced up to that time, the two sovereignties could foster social and especially “brotherly” relations. As Nicholas himself admits, the two differ in their style of life, in their endeavours, their morals, and their religion (*to sevāsmati*) that is, “that which they worship”. For Nicholas, however, even under such circumstances, brotherly relations *are* possible. He calls the sovereignty of the caliph “a God-given one” (*theōsdotos*)<sup>39</sup> and he lectures the caliph on the meaning of justice, magnanimity and statesmanship for a theocratic ruler.

In a second letter to the same caliph, Nicholas expresses again his pleasure at his friendship with him. The whole letter is a hymn to friendship. In closing, Nicholas calls the caliph “the best of my friends.”<sup>40</sup> He acknowledges the excellent upbringing (*eugēneia*) of the Caliph, his sensitivity and his high respect for friendship. He reminds him of Patriarch Photius’ respect and love for the Saracens, and especially for the caliph’s father, a respect which “no-one even among those of the same faith and of the same race has shown to you.”<sup>41</sup> In Photius, Nicholas Mysticos and in Gregory Palamas one sees a tradition of the State using ecclesiastics as political envoys to the Muslims. Nicholas continues the tradition of Photius, another envoy sent by Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912) to the “Assyrians” (the Abbasids) to plead for a better treatment of the Christians. Both these envoys pleaded with a characteristic dignity and respect for the caliph. One may generalize by saying that the ninth and tenth century intellectual revival of Patriarch Photius had an immediate and tangible impact upon Byzantine-Muslim relations. In this respect, the violent style of Arethas’ writing, a contemporary and disciple of Photius, is uncharacteristic.

## 7 The Mystical Approach

A few Byzantine writers, those especially coming from the monastic order, went beyond the externals, the conventions of time and the dictates of political expediency. Being preoccupied with religion as the human experience of the divine, they looked into Islam for signs of the human quest for the sacred, for

38 Nicholas Mysticos, col. 28B.

39 Nicholas Mysticos, col. 29A.

40 Nicholas Mysticos, col. 40A.

41 Nicholas Mysticos, col. 37A.

divine revelation and for grace. Few though these instances might be, they were nevertheless part of the Byzantine tradition in relationship to Islam. One may safely say that among the best and most constructive moments of Byzantine-Muslim relations were those in which monasticism and Sufism encountered and influenced each other.<sup>42</sup> John of Damascus, who wrote from the monastery of Mār Sābbā in the Judean desert, was himself an example of a serious student of the theology of Islam to which he gave credit for its “Christian” character, albeit “heretical.” The author of the *Sermon on St. Barbarus* presents a sensitive and receptive Muslim who becomes eventually a Christian martyr, honoured as a saint. Gregory Decapolites transfers all the qualities of an ideal mystic and confessor of faith to a Muslim prince who not only becomes a martyr for the Christian faith and a saint, but who is also blessed with insights and special experiences of the divine grace, to the shame of others who professed Christianity from birth. Finally, one should mention Gregory Palamas’ dialogues with the Muslim Turks and his acknowledgement and impression of Islam as a *theosēveia* (a profound reverence for God) in spite of his condemnation of the conduct of his Muslim captors.<sup>43</sup> A further study of later Sufism and Hesychasm will reveal some common ideals and concerns of the mystics:

- a) the notion of a mystical path leading to God, a path that returns into and enriches the world;
- b) a distinction made between the spiritual and the material body, without one abrogating the other: the goal is not the extinction of the physical body, but the emphasis is rather on the spiritualized body; the centre of the spiritual body is the heart, not the intellect; the intellect dwells in the heart, not in the brain; grace passes through the heart; intellect is to be distinguished from reason;
- c) the common emphasis on praxis and theoria, theoria meaning vision, not a mental construct;
- d) the preoccupation with the notion of spiritual warfare, or *jihad*, an unceasing holy war against the invisible powers of evil: spiritual life for monasticism, especially for Hesychasm and Sufism, is a matter of a continuous combat;
- e) the common focus on light: the experience of light is the tangible achievement in both spiritual traditions; sharing in the divine energies means becoming light;

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42 For bibliography and some characteristic insights into Hesychasm and Sufism, see Nasr.  
43 Sahas “Captivity,” p. 432; Sahas “Gregory,” pp. 20–21. See Chapters 29 and 28 in this volume.

- f) beyond light, there is darkness, or *gnofos*: the experience of the divine is a constant delving into the divine *gnofos*, which is the basis of apophatic theology;
- g) the end of the spiritual path which is *theosis* or union with God, a union which actually means extinction (*fanā'*) of one's own self-awareness and one's living in and with the divine (*ana al-Ḥaqq*).<sup>44</sup>

It is this rich and profound experience that made the encounter between mystics in Christianity and Islam less problematic or polemical. Byzantines of mystical disposition saw people, history, circumstances and religious traditions in an ontological sense, beyond space, time and political conventions. Thus, although polemical at the outset, they were more pacifists in their attitudes, language and expressions – concerned primarily with the ultimate destiny of human beings.

## 8 Anonymity

Some Byzantine writings have survived bearing no author's name.<sup>45</sup> These are few, very short, polemic in character and very unhistorical, something which makes their anonymity suspicious, and, at the same time, very interesting. Were such authors writing, perhaps, from places under Islamic rule, under direct threat of personal punishment and thus wanting to conceal their identity for reasons of security? Were they, perhaps, writing not from places under Islamic rule, but afraid of any possible broader repercussions of their writings upon the Christian population? Were these writings meant to be and remain anonymous, as a kind of underground subversive movement against Islamic rule?

Anonymous writings are few in comparison to the number of writings which bear a name, fictitious or not, of a writer. This phenomenon tells us that, in general, there was no reluctance or timidity involved on the part of the Byzantines when writing against Islam. We encounter the same outspokenness in anonymous as in attributed writings. These observations lead us to the following conclusions: a) polemic writings against Islam may not have been available to Muslims directly and even if they were, Muslims might not have been able to read or use them as evidence against their authors; b) there was a certain degree of freedom of expression among Christians, which the Muslims tolerated; and c) such writings came from authors living outside the sphere of effective Muslim control.

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<sup>44</sup> See also Nasr.

<sup>45</sup> PG, vol. 154, pp. 1152–70 and PG, vol. 158, pp. 1077–80.



## 9 The Effectiveness of Polemics

Notwithstanding the nature, artistic or non-artistic style, or content of dialogue or disputation, we have no indication that any of these polemic pieces of literature achieved the goal for which they were written, if the goal of those polemic writings was to embarrass, ridicule, convince or, in the end, convert the opponent. We have no indication that any result of this kind was accomplished. What we have are two kinds of instances: the first is the two letters of Nicholas Mysticos which contributed favourably to the release of the Cypriot captives. The second is the case found in the sermon of Gregory Decapolites where a Muslim prince is converted to Christianity, baptized and eventually becomes a Christian martyr as a result of a mystical experience in the context of worship and Eucharist. In the first instance it was the meek, conciliatory tone of Nicholas' language, and possibly the open acceptance of the Islamic sovereignty – actually its co-sovereignty with Christianity. In the second instance it was the mystical disposition conducive to a personal experience of the divine presence that broke the arrogance of the Muslim prince, urging him to seek submission. One may only suggest that the real effect that Byzantine polemicists had was to establish patterns of debate and polemics which, interestingly enough, have persisted until today with little change. This phenomenon proves that the patterns themselves and the issues under debate were of a “dead-end” nature; that is why they were, and they remain, ineffective.

Obviously the purpose of anti-Islamic polemics was purely academic and intellectual. Their practical purposes were to protect the Christian faith, keep the Christians within the Christian faith, and gain converts from Islam. It was hoped that that conversion, especially of prominent Muslims, would ease and even erase the conflict of the Christian empire with the Arabs. The narrator (because obviously this is not John Cantacouzenos himself) of the preface to John Cantacouzenos' four *Apologies against the Mohammedan Sect* expresses his disappointment that such events as the conversion of a prominent “Achaemenide,” i.e. Muslim, “was not about to ease the war of our nation.”<sup>46</sup>

## 10 Conclusion

The art of encounter and dialogue between Christians and Muslims can best be discerned in the actual life of the two religious communities in an

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46 PG, vol. 154, pp. 372–534 (on p. 372B).

indigenous culture. There conversions, dialogue and co-operation can be demonstrated. Arab Christians have not felt foreign in Arab-speaking countries, even after these countries were Islamized. One must not underestimate the Arab solidarity. Arab Christians have contributed immensely to the development of Christianity, its dogma and practice; I would say, of Islam as well.

Bishop George Khodr of Mt. Lebanon, in an interview to *al-Jamhoria* ("Democracy," December 6, 1985), without minimizing the danger coming from Islamic fanaticism, said: "Silence that springs from patience and which sanctifies the soul and makes it creative, has a far greater value than anger, escape or the rightful protest against certain Muslim fanatics."<sup>47</sup> In the same interview, another modern Arab Christian ecclesiastic, Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch, stated:

Arabism is not necessarily connected with Islam. In other words the Arab world is not a Muslim world. Of course the Arab countries are governed by Muslim leaders, but they have in their midst a percentage of Christian population of various kinds according to the country. We should not forget that the region was originally exclusively Christian. God has placed us here in order to stay. We do not feel that we exist against the will of someone. No-one can forget the 1400 years of the Muslim reality, and no-one wants to do that. We have become a minority in this region, which has clearly taken a Muslim character. What I want to emphasize is that we Christians are not strangers here and that we have been called to live with the Muslims forever.<sup>48</sup>

I would submit that this is the same Byzantine attitude that has been expressed by the most serious and eventually influential writers on Islam, especially among those with a profound spiritual disposition and an existential experience of the Arab Muslim world.

Why, then, should one study patterns of dialogue of the past, most of them being rather negative and ineffective? Perhaps in order to avoid making caricatures. Things which failed in the past are unlikely to be successful in the present, or in the future.

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<sup>47</sup> *Episkepsis*, no. 350 (1 Feb. 1986), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

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## The “Oriental” Character of the Byzantine-Islamic Relations: One Essence – Various Expressions

The jacket cover of the well-known collective volume *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times*, edited by Michael Bonner,<sup>1</sup> offers the reader a foretaste of the book with the following statement:

The Byzantine Empire was the Islamic commonwealth’s first and most stubborn adversary. For many centuries it loomed large in Islamic diplomacy, military operations and commerce, as well as in Islamic representations of the world in general. Moreover, the ways in which early Muslims and Byzantines perceived one another both polemically and otherwise afterwards proved decisive for the mutual perceptions between the Islamic world and Christian Western Europe. For these and other reasons, Arab-Byzantine relations have been a major concern of modern scholarship on early Islam.

One could modify and amplify the last two lines of the statement by saying that “For these and other reasons, Arab-Byzantine and Muslim-Christian relations *ought to be of a major concern of modern scholarship, not only on early but on Islam of all centuries*”.

The studies included in the book are grouped in five units under the headings: a) war and diplomacy, b) borders and military organization, c) polemics and the image of the “other”, d) influences and convergence, and e) martyrdom and holy war (*jihād*). With the exception of unit, d) “influences and convergence”, the overall impression which the other four betray is a confrontational framework in which Byzantine-Arab relations fall. No matter how single-sided this impression might be,<sup>2</sup> the fact remains that Byzantines and Arabs from

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1 Bonner (2004).

2 The single-minded preoccupation with the adversarial character of Arab-Byzantine relations needs to be re-considered critically to include also manifold peace and safe conduct treaties (*amān*) signed, commercial, political, cultural and linguistic relations, exchanges of embassies, interments and ransom of prisoners of war, conclusion of truces, building of mosques, religious practices and customs, theological dialogues and personality exchanges, ideological cross-fertilizations, use of advisors, civil servants and counsellors, even mixed marriages; aspects some of which are fortunately hinted to or highlighted in studies in this

the time of the rise of Islam created a state of friction, confrontation and war between themselves. This statement answers the question as to what was *that which* prevailed in the relations between the two worlds? There is, however, a second and more crucial question which is in urgent need of an answer if one wishes to gain an insight into the texture of these relations; and this has to do with the "Who, and what kind of people, were really those who were in a state of friction, confrontation and war?". This is not an obvious, irrelevant or an easy question to be investigated and answered. Its relevance runs through history. As for its urgency this is noted implicitly in the very aforementioned statement of Bonner's book jacket:

Moreover the ways in which early Muslims and Byzantines perceived one another both polemically and otherwise afterwards proved decisive for the mutual perceptions between the Islamic world and *Christian Western Europe* (the emphasis is ours).

In other words, the Christian Western Europe in its relations with the Islamic world was influenced by the relations of the Byzantines with the Muslim Arabs. Consequently it is imperative for scholarship to describe and interpret correctly these relations so that the Christian Western Europe may understand better and explain its own relations with the Arab and the Muslim world! The challenge, then, posed to us here is to attempt to differentiate the kind and the quality of Byzantine-Arab relations from those between the Christian *Western* Europe and the Arab Islamic world. The topic, admittedly enormous and intricate, is treated here only in a sketchy, spotty and implied manner. Thus, in case the point is lost we will state it in advance: the Christian Western Europe created impressions and formed relations with

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present volume. Most of these studies confirm and intensify this general field, and enrich the sense of a deeper relationship and inner connection between Byzantines and Arabs. Cf. for example, B. Caseau, "L'encens au 7<sup>e</sup> et 8<sup>e</sup> siècle: un marqueur du commerce en Méditerranée?" (in the present volume) for the trade and the use of incense; J.-C. Cheynet, "Byzance et ses voisins musulmans (X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> s.)" (in the present volume) for diplomacy and the means used for it; K. Durak, "Traffic across the Cilician frontier in the ninth and tenth centuries: movement of people between Byzantium and the Islamic Near East in the early Middle Ages" (in the present volume) for the procedures and the ceremonial of exchange of prisoners; T.M. Muhammad, "The civil Byzantine functions and titles as known by the Arabs in the Middle Byzantine period" (in the present volume) for the knowledge, use or misuse of Byzantine titles by the Arab Muslims, etc. Cf. also El-Cheikh (2004b) throughout, and the many studies of Marius Canard, including his Canard (1964). Diplomacy plays a central role in Byzantine-Arab relations themselves, as well as in revealing the kinship between the two worlds. For a general survey till the mid eleventh century, see Kennedy (1992).

the Arab Muslim world which were indirect, second-hand and much later in time from those which Byzantium had crafted; such relations were neither identical nor qualitatively equivalent to those of the Christian Eastern or Middle Eastern world, and this because between the Arab and the Byzantine world there existed an indigenous and binding bond which one may call “Oriental” – in whichever sense a researcher may approach or interpret the term, but certainly not defined or exhausted by simply its geographic connotation! The two worlds, Byzantine and Arab, although not identical they are not alien or different from each other. Between the two there existed not only common geographical borders but also, and especially, an inner “border”; and a porous one. Borders may divide and distinguish people, as they may also serve as meeting zones where cultures and traditions interpenetrate each other creating relations which are expressed in similar albeit distinct manners – even in case of confrontation.<sup>3</sup>

It is not without meaning the fact that many Arab authors, including ‘Alī ibn al-Husain al-Mas‘ūdī (896–956), the Mu‘tazilī intellectual, historian, traveller and geographer who dealt with Byzantine history more systematically than any other Arab-Muslim, became intensely interested in determining their own origin as well as that of the Byzantines (*al-Rūm*). Some of them connected Byzantines and Arabs to Noah by making them descendants of his first-born son Shem, while others of Noah’s third son, Japheth! In both cases Byzantines and Arabs were, in their mind, blood related brothers.<sup>4</sup> Such an identity did not prevent Arabs from recognizing the Byzantines as a multi-cultural and poly-ethnic whole, and of excellent qualities at that because of its complexity; on the contrary, they considered it as an achievement and they endeavoured to emulate it! As far as the historical period is concerned, one needs not feel apologetic when reminding, and with some emphasis, that relations between Byzantines and Arabs pre-existed the rise of both Christianity and Islam and into a considerable depth of time; something which carries a significant amount of repercussions as to the understanding of the identity and the religion of each other. The multi-volume work of Irfan Shahīd and especially his two initial volumes<sup>5</sup> provides a firm starting point for looking at this background.<sup>6</sup> A different psychology seems to be in opera-

3 Bonner (1996) 107–134, discusses unique forms of asceticism that evolved on the Arab-Byzantine frontier, a major issue to the significance of which its influence on Islam and on Sufism we will refer later.

4 El-Cheikh (2004b) 22–23.

5 Shahīd (1984a); Shahīd (1984b).

6 Shahīd (1989); Shahīd (1995a); Shahīd (1995b); Shahīd (2002) and Shahīd (2009). See also Christides (1981).



tion between Western and Byzantine Christians with regard to their relations with the Arab Muslims. A small indication is the fact that the residents of Constantinople were unable to tolerate a Latin church inside the walls of the city (certainly more so after the Fourth Crusade), while they had allowed a mosque (*masjid*) to exist certainly since the tenth century if not, as it is alleged, since the beginning of the eighth century, in the imperial praetorium (*μαγίσδιον ἐν τῷ βασιλικῷ πραιτωρίῳ*) and in the context of the first Arab siege of Constantinople in 717 at the request of general Maslamah!<sup>7</sup> According to the tenth century geographer Ishāq b. al-Husayn, Constantinople was adorned with magnificent churches, as well as mosques in use by Muslim captives whose treatment by the Byzantines was characterized by Patriarch Nicholas Mysticos (852–925) as an expression of philanthropy (*φιλανθρωπία*) and guardianship on the part of those who have the upper hand (*ὡς ὑπερεξουσίων κήδεσθαι*),<sup>8</sup> meaning the Byzantines.

These preliminary and broad reminders have aimed at pointing to the dynamics and the distinctly different texture of the Byzantine-Arab relations from the beginning, compared to those developed in the Latin West before and during the Crusades and, perhaps, because of them. Exceptions and differentiations notwithstanding, the Byzantine-Arab and the early Eastern Christian-Muslim relations were evolved within a controversial context, but also with a sense of kinship which was expressed in an unspoken mutual admiration of each other, and with a distinct treatment of matters of essence and everyday life. The documentation and analysis of such an intricate and on the fence perception and relationship between these two sides has already successfully begun. The image of the Byzantines from the Arabic sources has emerged and, generally speaking, it is not at all uncomplimentary.<sup>9</sup> Equivalent work to bring to light the image of the Arab Muslims from the side of the Byzantine sources needs to be intensified.<sup>10</sup> Images of each other are not monolithic. They change by "the persistent fluctuation of power between the two rivals",<sup>11</sup> a fluctuation which, from what I can confirm from my study of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, and depending on the times, the events, the political conditions, the characters, the persons and even the questions at hand under analysis or refutation, form a spectrum which stretches from sobriety to dissonance;<sup>12</sup> and this, too, is an "oriental" characteristic. Yet, even such

7 Constantine Porphyrogenitus I, 92.

8 Nicholas I Ep. 102, 376–377. See also Reinert (1977) 127–129.

9 Cf. Shboul (2004); El-Cheikh (2004b); El-Cheikh (2001).

10 A good beginning on the topic is Jeffreys (1983).

11 El-Cheikh (2004b) 15.

12 Sahas (2014). See Chapter 2 in this volume.

negative images or views of the other reveal a kinship and familiarity in a *reciprocal* contrast to the other.

Very often a certain act or behaviour of the Byzantines acted upon the Arabs in a reflective manner calling for an immediate response at the very moment when a particular reference was made to them. A telling example is the Arab reaction to the Byzantine argument that the lack of miracles on the part of Muhammad disqualifies him as a prophet proving him lower to Christ. The response was immediate. The *Hadīth* was embellished with a series of miracles of Muhammad, similar or exact equivalent to those found in the New Testament, in such a profusion that contradicts the Qur'ānic norm which demotes the prophets as autonomous agents of "signs" and the significance of miracles on their part.<sup>13</sup> The trend continued with a number of Arab Muslim authors concentrating on the life of Muhammad and the many miracles he performed.<sup>14</sup> Another example of Arab reflexive reaction to a Byzantine challenge is the response of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansūr (754–775) to the effort of the court of Constantine V (741–775) to impress Umāra ibn Hamza, the caliph's envoy, by transmuting lead into silver and copper into gold with the magic powder of "elixir". The "trick" motivated immediately the Abbasid emir to busy himself with the art of alchemy resulting in important discoveries in the fields of chemistry and pharmacology!<sup>15</sup>

Even in instances of warfare where the goal of each side was to prevail over the other in the battlefield one finds references to sentiment and mutuality and, at times, opportunities for creating channels of approach and communication. Sophia Patoura has convincingly shown how prisoners of war became a "civilizing" element between Byzantines and Arabs well before the rise of Islam;<sup>16</sup> while the poet Jarīr praising the Umayyad prince Mu'āwiya b. Hishām reminds the Byzantines that:

Even if you hate us, yet the *Rūm* are your ancestors; And the *Rūm* are bearing no hatred towards the Arabs!<sup>17</sup>

There is also a further interesting side on this point of war that the diligent and detailed way in which Arab historians used to record every single expedition against the Byzantines has been related to their admiration towards the

13 Qur'ān 3:49, 5:110, 7:188, 6:50, 13:7, 6:125, 29:50, etc. See also, Sahas (1972).

14 Wessels (1972) 78–86.

15 Cf. Psaroudakis (2013).

16 Patoura (1994) and Patoura (2013). On the Byzantine attitude towards war, see Haldon (1999) and Laiou (2006) with extensive bibliography.

17 Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahāni 14:83; El-Cheikh (2004b) 34.

Byzantines which has also been explained in terms of the importance which the Arabs ascribed to them!<sup>18</sup> An expedition against the Byzantines, even when its purpose was not to conquer Byzantine land, was a cause of honour for the one in charge, especially if he was a caliph.<sup>19</sup> Very often expeditions were connected with and were taking place during the hajj, without such endeavours being considered as a "holy war" (*jihād*) against infidels!<sup>20</sup>

The two factors which by means of an unyielding rivalry divided the two communities into two mutually excluding and mutually annulling worlds<sup>21</sup> were the Arab invasions and religion.<sup>22</sup> The invasions, immediately following the successful wars of Heraclius against the Persians, cut off from Byzantium and absorbed into the Arab camp its priceless Eastern provinces, while the factor "religion" came to question the *raison d'être* and the uniqueness of the other.<sup>23</sup> In reality, Arabs and Byzantines contributed equally to the weight of these two factors. One may call this share a "contribution" as there is no sufficient, objective and countable historical evidence for a value judgment which may term it as "responsibility". What needs to be noted is that war and religion are two factors which are not independent and unrelated to each other. In the case of Byzantines and Arabs, these two factors constitute the two sides of the same coin. They are interwoven, mutually interpenetrated and rendered ideologically into a fact and way of life.<sup>24</sup> War and religion constitute an inherent element in the Byzantine-Arab relations without, necessarily, interrupting the continuation or cancelling the further development of a communication between the two. During the same early period of time when action in the battle field was at its peak and the poet al-Qaffāl was writing to emperor Nicephorus II Focas (963–969) that "*For three hundred years we are reaping off your heads with axes*", Byzantine influence on the Arabs in the fields of natural sciences, philosophy, theology and mysticism were intensified!<sup>25</sup> In the broader field of culture influences are more subtle, albeit crucial. The *Sīrat*, for example, where narratives and especially responses to questions are put into

18 El-Cheikh (2004b) 85.

19 The whole chapter two of El-Cheikh (2004b) 83–129 is rich in this kind of information on the Arab side.

20 For the difference between "holy war" and "crusade" between Arabs and Byzantines, see Stouraitis (2011) with an extensive bibliography. Cf. also Cook (2005) and especially Laiou and Mottahedeh (2001), a "must" on the subject.

21 Cf. Sahas (1993).

22 See, Griffith (2008), esp. Ch. 11 "Apocalypse and the Arabs: The First Christian Responses to the Challenge of Islam".

23 Cf. Gregory (2010) 176 ff.

24 Cf. Shboul (1999) 122–135.

25 El-Cheikh (2004b), 175. See also, Vryonis (1992); Shahīd (1992).

poetic or form of elegy,<sup>26</sup> reflects influences from the Byzantine culture. This seems to be a Damascene tradition where poets-orators, such as Sophronius the later Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638), embellish their writings with anacreontic elegies. According to the *Sīrat* Muhammad's speech "is sweet, his root is a palm-tree whose branches are fruitful."<sup>27</sup>

With the rise of Islam the factor religion brought Byzantines and Arabs to a confrontation of particular intensity. The seventh century is, definitely, a century in which major developments can be noticed in Byzantium, and this because of the rise of Islam.<sup>28</sup> For a better understanding of this factor we must comprehend what was really at stake for both, the Byzantines and the Arabs. To begin with "religion" as word does not exist in either the Byzantine or the Arab vocabulary. Its notion is expressed in the Christian community with the expression "the way" (ἡ ὁδός), which seems to be the first name of Christianity,<sup>29</sup> and in Islam with the word *dīn* (= behavior, way of life) – inherent and metaphorical words in both cases which point to a "way of life"; an essential, "oriental", point of convergence! The conflict, therefore, between Christian Byzantium and Arab Islam was not for a "dogma" but for the prevalence of a way of life considered by each of the opponents to be one and unique, overshadowing and excluding at once the other. For the Byzantines who were holding strong the notion that there was no interruption or alienation between them and antiquity,<sup>30</sup> their "religion", Christianity, had become instrumental in refining their Roman past. Equally for the proud Arabs, Islam as a God-selected, given and perfected *dīn*<sup>31</sup> had become also instrumental in refining and perfecting the traditional Arab way of life in a way that it could impress and move to tears even an official Christian leader like the Negus of Ethiopia.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there could be no way by which such a central and refining element of identity as "religion", could be compromised or diminished by either side; rather the opposite: the truth of the one and the forgery of the other had to be exposed

26 Cf. *The Life of Muhammad* in passim, esp. 161 where Umm Jamil's poem.

27 Guillaume (1968), 121. The expression is reminiscent of the characteristic Marcellos phrase *φιλέρημος εἰς πόλιν βαῖν οὐ λαμβάνει* in Philereimos' story. Ἰωάννης Μόσχος, *Λειμῶν* CLII: 3017B. On John Moschus' *Pratum Spirituale*, see Sahas (1997). See Chapter 13 in this volume.

28 28. See Haldon (1990); Sahas (1991).

29 Cf. Acts 9:2, 18:25, 19:9, 23, 22:4, 22.

30 See Kazhdan (1982) 120–121.

31 Qur'ān 5:3.

32 Cf. Guillaume (1968), 146–153.

in a dynamic way, manifested in life and action, tested and proven in the battle field using its outcome as a measure and criterion of judgement.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, from the beginning we have a relationship and "communality" of subtle but fundamental ideas and notions<sup>34</sup> within the Byzantine and Arab-Muslim society, which was leading the one to observe, describe, admire and target the other with a particular attention, sensitivity and, perhaps, envy. The admiration of the Arabs towards the Byzantines became evident especially in such areas as imperial administration and protocol,<sup>35</sup> the art (especially architecture),<sup>36</sup> music,<sup>37</sup> marine technology,<sup>38</sup> and in the field of construction, woodwork, handicraft in which, in the words of the encyclopaedic Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhiz (781–869),<sup>39</sup> the Byzantines have no equals; not to mention the vast areas of sciences, like geometry,<sup>40</sup> and of philosophy, literature, theology on which the Byzantine influence and the Arab response have extensively been studied.<sup>41</sup> Al-Mas'udī (896–956) speaks of the *Rūm* as possessing wisdom (*hikma*) and being gifted in various branches of philosophy, sciences and the arts.<sup>42</sup> The whole field of art reveals an inherent affinity between the Eastern Byzantine periphery, like Palestine, and the folk Arab art already from before the rise of Islam, an affinity which continues to be noticeable as a common and coalescent cultural expression far beyond the Arab conquests.<sup>43</sup>

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- 33 On the relations between Islam and Byzantine Christianity the bibliography is immense. In an indicative way see, Waardenburg (2003) ch. 5:1 and 2; and Tolan (2002) esp. ch. 3 "Early Eastern Christian Relations to Islam".
- 34 "Words" and "notions" are not identical meanings. Many words and notions have in mind or imply the Byzantines, conditions, relations and their actions as the tenth-century poetic work *Qasīda Sasāniyya*, which deals with descriptions and forms of hell. See Bosworth (1976).
- 35 El-Cheikh (2004a) 35 ff.
- 36 Cf. Grabar (1964); Kleiner (2009) esp. chs. 9 and 10.
- 37 Shannon (2006); Farmer (1994).
- 38 On this field see the remarks and the bibliographical references of Hermes (2009) 38, n. 10.
- 39 El-Cheikh (2004b), 60.
- 40 Cf. al-Tawhidī and al-Muqaffa' (d. 759), in El-Cheikh (2004b), 105; Gutas (2004).
- 41 The literature is far too long to be mentioned here. In general, see Von Grunenbaum (1964).
- 42 El-Cheikh (2004b), 107.
- 43 Cf. Hamdan (2013). On the vast field of Byzantine and Islamic art, see Haffman (ed.) (2007), the studies in Part III, "Image and Word: Early Byzantine and Islamic Art", various studies in Muqarnas with the bibliography (1993–2007) of the master on the subject Oleg Grabar, pp. (viii–x); Ettinghausen (1972).

In addition to the notion “religion” the notion of the “state” holds also a special place with particular weight in the converging Byzantine and Arab political ideology.<sup>44</sup> The very perceptive title of Nazih N. Ayubi’s book, *Over-stating the Arab State, Politics and Society in the Middle East*<sup>45</sup> with reference to our modern day developments, warns that one needs to transcend and “over-state” the word and notion “state” in order to be able to discover its essential meaning, as the present day word contradicts or it is foreign to the notion of “society” or “community” which defines the Christian-Byzantine and the Muslim-Arab reality. Thus, with the advent of Islam the Arab world becomes *dār al-islām* and *umma islamiyya*, in the model of Byzantium which, for the Byzantines, was not simply a “state” but “l’Empire Chrétien de l’Orient romain” as Héléne Ahrweiler has defined it in a summary form.<sup>46</sup> Certainly, the meaning of this definition is to be found in the emphasis of all three terms: “Empire”,<sup>47</sup> “Chrétien” and “Orient romain”. Therefore, and always with due respect, we could say that both Georg Ostrogorsky’s and John Karayiannopoulos’ identification of Byzantium as “States” from the side of the Europeans, and “κράτος” from the side of the Greeks<sup>48</sup> is in variance with the Byzantine and Arab self-understanding. In both societies the “state” was primarily its own people, taking shapes and forms depending on its relations with the others.<sup>49</sup> The Byzantine emperor was for the Byzantines the “faithful king of the Romans” (not of Rome). Reciprocally, the Arab caliph was the *amīr al-muʾminīn* (the leader of the faithful), and the Arab-Muslim society was first and foremost the “caliphate” – a “state” ascertained by the self-consciousness of the *umma islamiyya* and its members, with the *amīr al-muʾminīn* himself as a successor (*khalīfa*) to the Prophet, all “submitted” (*muslim*) to God alone! Thus, statesmanship and authority have to do with the self-understanding and self-consciousness of the people-members of the two communities in terms of unity and authority. Such notions do not come even close to such Western terms as “theocracy” or “theocentricity”.<sup>50</sup> On this topic we should be reminded of something even simpler: from the point of view of religious and spiritual identity, in Byzantine society the notion

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44 Cf. Haldon (1999).

45 Ayubi (2006). Consider also Ayubi (1991).

46 Ahrweiler (1975) 5. See also Olster (2006).

47 In the words of Cavallo (1997) 3, “One of the most specific features of the Byzantines is ... their awareness of belonging to an empire. This basic awareness insured the continuity of New Rome and the East when the western empire collapsed”. For the notions “state” and “empire”, see also Goldstone and Haldon (2009), 4.

48 Ostrogorsky (1963) and Karayiannopoulos (2001) respectively.

49 Cf. Ahrweiler (1975).

50 See also Runciman (1977).

(indeed, the faith) that prevailed from the earliest days of Christianity was that the "Church" (*Ekklesia*) in its spiritual and visible dimension is the "body of Christ"<sup>51</sup> whose members are all the faithful, including the bishop and the emperor. The guardianship and unity of both the State and the Church were guaranteed by the office of the emperor and of the bishop (*episkopos*, lit. the "overseer") – two heads of one eagle!<sup>52</sup> The full title of the bishop (*episkopos*, not a "despot", *δεσπότης*, as we have become accustomed to say), indicated the "overseer from the rampart tower" of a given flock of living people (like the imperial title *βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων*), like Romans, Ephesians, Corinthians, Antiocheans, Alexandrians, Constantinopolitans etc. – not of cities which by definition and construction contain also trees, streets, shops, aqueducts etc. The distinction was, and remains, crucial. It is a modern phenomenon that part of the Muslim world today is preoccupied by certain theories as to Politics-and-State; something which has to be taken as simply an "ideology" expressed in some modern political trend. Political Islam, Nazih Ayubi notes in his prologue, represents simply one of the many and different ideologies and political expressions of a cross-influence between religion and politics. Such a theory is a totally new phenomenon originating from the time after the First World War; it is not inherent nor does it exist in Islam except as an endeavour of the so-called "reformed" Islam, a current which aims at showing that such a theory pre-existed and it wants now to revive.<sup>53</sup> In the political relations sector between Byzantium and the Arabs, therefore, there are essential characteristics of self-conscientiousness, tradition and culture which one should not pass unnoticed.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, even in a confrontational situation between the Byzantine and the Arab "states", that is to say between two distinct communities, civilizations and religions (and especially there) there are religious, spiritual, ideological, practical and cultural expressions which are calling for a deeper analysis and a more congenial understanding of each other. For example (and this is a very big "example"!), the fact that Islam refers to the two Abrahamic traditions which preceded it, Judaism and Christianity, in a critical manner setting forth its own emergence as a necessary correction and fulfilment of the other two (the exact same position which Christianity takes vis-à-vis Judaism<sup>55</sup>),

51 Cf. Rom. 12 :5 ; 1 Cor. 10 :16, 17 ; 12 :13 ; Eph. 1:23; 4:12, Col. 1:18, 24 and Ἰγνώστιος ὁ Ἀντιοχείας, Magn. VI 1; Trall. II 1, 2; III 1; Philad. IV; Smyrn. VIII 1, 2; IX 1; Eph. IV.

52 Meyendorff (2002), esp. II Church and State, pp. 43–88.

53 Ayubi (1991), ix and 1.

54 Cf. Canard (1964).

55 Cf. Hebr. 8:13. In speaking of a new covenant, the author treats the first as obsolete. And "what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away".

shows an insistence and a convergence on the same crucial point: that what is in operation is a progressive revelation, which implies and requires a logical and natural overcoming and replacement of a previous one by the latter. A telling consequence of this thinking is the characterization of the Qur'ān by modern apologists of Islam as being the "Last Testament", in the manner of the characterization of the Torah by the Christians as the "Old Testament" vis-à-vis their own "New Testament". If a Christian would venture to counter this train of thinking by referring to Christianity in terms of Biblical notions of "newness" and of "new creation",<sup>56</sup> a Muslim may reply that Islam as "submission" (*islām*) constitutes man's return to the natural state (*fitr*) of his relationship with God the creator – which is the primordial, unique and ever "new" state of humanity! But with such questions one enters into deep waters of matters of confession and faith.

There is a plethora of such "theoretical", confessional, theological, ideological and phenomenological issues which are common between Byzantine Orthodox Christianity and Islam, not simply because of the fundamental affinities between Christianity and Islam as religious traditions with common roots, but as mentalities in related cultures. Such issues may have a different meaning and value in each religious community, they represent however the same or similar phenomenon. They may be expressed in different words but they are preoccupied or characterized by the same texture of and the sensitivity towards the issue itself. Three examples can provide a hint of evidence on this point: a) the issue of the authenticity of scriptures, b) the view of the past of each religion and, thus, the value of its present, and c) the inherent cohesion between "Church" and "State". The words in italics want to identify and emphasize the key issue in each case. The notion of corruption (*tahrif*) and/or concealment of certain texts so that evidence of the coming of a new prophet and of a new revelation may be denied or obliterated is a well-known Muslim argument against the authenticity of the Christian scriptures with the support of the Qur'ān itself.<sup>57</sup> The argument refers to the misreading and corrupted interpretation by the Christians of the Biblical verses about the Paraclete in the gospel of John which for the Muslims refer to Ahmad that is, to Muhammad himself.<sup>58</sup> The type of argument is already found wholesale in the Dialogue of Justin the philosopher and martyr († ca. 165) with Trypho the Jew that the Jews counterfeited the scriptures so that they may misinterpret the predictions

56 Rm. 6:4, 7:6, 2 Cor, 5:17, Gal. 6:15, Rev. 21:5.

57 Q 4:46, 2:59 and 144, 3:71, 5:13.

58 Q 15:23–26 and 16:7–8. McAuliffe (1991), 183; Watt (1953); Watt (1955–56).



about and references of the prophets to the coming of the Messiah.<sup>59</sup> As to the view of their past communities and, thence, the value of each new religious identity, both Christianity and Islam identify them with identical terms as times of ignorance<sup>60</sup> and *jahiliyya*, respectively.<sup>61</sup> Finally, there is an inherent cohesion (not necessarily identity) between the notions "Church" and "State", religious and secular life, Byzantine emperor and caliph to which we referred before, which is common, integral and meaningful to both worlds, with all the idiosyncrasies and divergence of the two poles.

One other area of profound affinity and one that is in need of further study, is that of the monastic ideal, in its broad sense, its ethos and practice and as a stand towards life, a central force within Byzantine society and in the formation of Sufism; even in the emergence and the character of Islam itself. This is, certainly, a corner-stone issue for the understanding of Islam in its roots as the extensive bibliography on the subject indicates, and one in need of further investigation and analysis.<sup>62</sup> One could recall and note on this issue that a) the very word *islām* (which means "submission" or obedience) constitutes the essence itself of the monastic ethos and praxis; b) according to a very perceptive definition by Hossein Nasr, "Islam is a democracy of married monks",<sup>63</sup> and c) that according to the ninth-century definition of the ideal and morally perfect man of the mystical brotherhood of the Ikhwān as-Safā', such a man has to come from Persia, be of an Arab faith, have an Iraqi education, be of Jewish acuteness, be a disciple of Jesus as far as conduct is concerned, be *pious as a Byzantine monk, Rūm* in the fields of science, Indian in the interpretation of mysteries, a Muslim mystic (Sufi) in all his spiritual life.<sup>64</sup> For our specific discussion we note that the standards of a pious person are set by "a Byzantine monk" and that an excellent scientist is a *Rūm!*

The ordinary, everyday life expresses in an even more emphatic way the common way of thinking, attitude towards life and the way of seeing the "other". Of great importance in this respect is the rich nomenclature, Byzantine and Arabic one, serious or humorous, used in euphemism, nicknaming and other instances, all of them competing each other in spirit, perception, ingenuity and imagination – an oriental characteristic par excellence, and a means of

59 Ἰουστίνου φιλοσόφου καὶ μάρτυρος 71–74 and the Islamic teaching on *tahrif*.

60 Acts 17:30.

61 From w. *djahili*, which refers to the pagan Arab. See entry in Gibb and Kramers (eds.) (1965) 82–83.

62 The bibliography on the subject is extensive. Ephrat (2008); Livne-Kafri (1996); Knysh (2009); Sahas (1996b).

63 Nasr (1975) 110.

64 Ettinghausen (1976) 57. The emphasis is ours.

offense, and self-defence. Inventing names, playing with words, or name-calling by transliterating or transforming a name for the purpose of debasing and ridiculing a foe, is a feature widely found in the Byzantine polemic literature including the anti-Islamic one; so is in the Arabic literature. The examples are numerous.<sup>65</sup> On a smaller scale of evidence, one finds specific notions, concepts, ideals and institutions in one tradition, with parallel or equivalent ones in the other, which become immediately recognizable and understood by both. For example, the use and meaning of the multi-faceted Byzantine word *canon* (ruler, “right path”, rule of faith, canon law, regulation, moral standard, liturgical order) and the equivalent *sharī‘a* (literally, “the clear path”, or single path) in Islam; the codification of Islamic law in the “Six Books” to correspond, perhaps, to the so-called *Vasilika* or *Exavivlos* of Leo VII the Wise (886–912); the meaning and the authority of Theology in the Byzantine community and for the Muslim community the corresponding *Kalām* [from *kalima* = “word” of debate, connected perhaps to the Greek *κάλαμος*, or “pen”]; the notion of “saint” (*mawalis*) and the meaning of “sainthood” as a mutual and profound friendship between God and man – a clearly New Testament terminology;<sup>66</sup> the meaning of fasting in its essence and the way it is observed; holidays, communal prayer sessions (the *synaxis* and the *jum‘a* correspondingly) and their expressive ritual; the sense and meaning of *ijma* and of the synodical tradition respectively, where it is the consensus and the sense of a common process (*syn-odos*) rather than the procedure of a Concilium with a majority vote that prevails in the definition and interpretation of religious truth; the notions of a “framework” (*horos*) or “principle” of faith which, as a consequence of the above mentioned synodical process, defines the borders rather than determines in absolute terms and dogmas the orthodox faith; the understanding and characterization in both traditions of “heresy” as “innovation” (*neoterismos* and *bid‘ah*), a deviation from the “straight path” that inclines neither to the right nor to the left (ortho-doxy);<sup>67</sup> the corresponding lean and plain formulae of confessions of faith, like the one made by Peter (Mat. 16:16) or the Christian baptismal symbols on the one hand, and the *shahāda* on the other; the meaning and significance of the public pronouncement of the name of the local bishop at the communal prayer meetings and the corresponding

65 In the *Sīrat* the Quraysh called Muhammad (a name which means “the laudable one”) Mudhamman which means a “reprobate”! Guillaume (1968), f. 234/162. See also Upshur (*et al.* eds.) (2012), 393ff, 403.

66 John 3:29, 15:13, 15:14, 15:15, James 2:23.

67 See Henderson (1998), 88.

acclamation of the name of the caliph by the local chief during the Friday common prayer (*jum'a*) – a practice which began in the ninth century of the Islamic community;<sup>68</sup> or the opposite: the implication of deleting the name of a bishop from the diptychs and the silence over the name of the caliph at the *jum'a*;<sup>69</sup> the kissing of the hand of a clergy, in and outside the church, and the expression of respect and honour since the early Fatimid period by the exact same way towards a teacher of al-Azhar at the end of his lecture;<sup>70</sup> the celebration and confirmation of purification of a woman after childbirth with the presentation of the infant at the mosque, and the corresponding service of *sarantismos* on the fortieth day after childbirth in the Orthodox Church;<sup>71</sup> the ceremonial haircut at baptism, or the tonsure of a monk or nun, and the corresponding *tasmiyah* on the seventh day after the birth of a child, and the ritual haircut which men undergo during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*); the meaning of fasting and its role at times as a means of censure;<sup>72</sup> the higher Byzantine academies operating in a place which was at the same time a place of worship<sup>73</sup> – something which is expressed by the very name given to the Islamic temple as *masjid* (= "place of prostration") and *jami'* (from w. *jami'ah* = "knowledge"); the chanting of the Biblical readings in Eastern Christianity and correspondingly those of the Qur'ān may constitute a common practice from Judaism but since the tenth century its confinement to seven accepted ways or odes reminds of the specified eight odes of the Byzantine music;<sup>74</sup> the night service on the memorial day of a saint (*haul*) in Islam in which central feature is the commemoration (*dhikr*) in a choral chanting of the way of his life that corresponds to the all-night vigils Orthodox vespers in which, especially in Orthodox monasteries of the East, central features are the special hymns and *troparia* in honour of the saint along with the reading of a lengthy liturgical vita (*synaxarion*);<sup>75</sup> and many more such similar or equivalent notions and practices.

68 Hitti (1970), 13 ff.

69 Peters (1994), 201.

70 Dodge (1961), 18.

71 Joseph and Najmabadi (2005), 801; Sengers (2003), 165.

72 Jeffery (ed.) (1958) 197–199.

73 The academy where Michael Psellos (1018–after 1081) and John Xiphilinos (d. after 1081) taught philosophy and law respectively, was operating in the church of St. Peter in Constantinople.

74 Dodge (1961), 43. See also Jeffery (2001), 160.

75 During the all-night vigil service in honour of St. Catherine at the homonymous monastery at Sinai, and in other monasteries, the lengthy synaxare of the saint is read. See also Smith (1931), 139.

At this particular junction it is very important to pause for a moment in order to remark that, in spite of its different anthropology and soteriology, Islam celebrates the memory of a saint on the anniversary of his *death* (which in Christianity is the *dormition* day or that of “falling asleep”), not of his birth – a clear overarching of a Christian influence! Even more telling is the fact that the day of the birth of Muhammad the Prophet has been moved in the Muslim calendar on the 12th of the month *Rabīʿ al-awwal*, which is actually the day of his ... death!<sup>76</sup> Of interest also is the fact that although miracles of saints, even of Muhammad, do not hold a central place in Islam, except in Sufism, miracles in the Muslim community have assumed the name *karamāt* that is to say, “spiritual gifts” (*charismata*, according to the Byzantine spirituality), which are to be differentiated from the *muʿjizat*, the miracles which serve to prove that someone has indeed been called to become a prophet!<sup>77</sup>

One could go on with a myriad of such topics which form a huge network of a common frame of mind, experience, tradition and practice between Byzantine and Arab societies. The more one ponders on each one of them as to its origin, meaning, symbolism and expression the deeper one dives into an intriguing phenomenology of religion and culture; something which neither the Byzantine theologians nor the Muslim controversialists ventured to enter. Historical realities, particular persons and circumstances in space and time were the factors which gave rise to and formed such undefined relations between Byzantines and the Muslim Arabs, and at times with a distinct absolutism at that.<sup>78</sup> On the part of Christianity such absolutism is based on the

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76 Hurgronje (1888–1889), 46.

77 Adams (1933), 161.

78 One needs not go any further than perusing a characteristic Byzantine, like Theophanes the Confessor (ca.760–818) and his *Chronographia*, in order to gain a bird's eye view not only of facts, persons and events, but also a sense of the remarkable breath, depth, intensity, mixture and texture of the Byzantine – Arab relations during the early and crucial period (629–812), his own generally negative attitude notwithstanding: For example, both Leo III (r. 717–741) and the Umayyad caliph Yazīd (r. 720–724) are characterized by him as “God's enemies” for their hostility towards saints, relics and icons; victories or defeats of either side are attributed to God's intervention or wrath; orthodoxy or heresy are presented as factors which work against or in favour of either side; misfortunes in battles are explained as lessons to be learnt; miraculous signs play a role of guidance in social or political stance; behaviour of Byzantine emperors and Arab caliphs are compared or contrasted to each other not always in an one-sided way; instances of cross-fertilization in politics, art and cultural diplomacy are reported with prominence as matters of common base; easy use of Byzantine and Arab terminology shows the fluency in public communication; the frequent reference to Byzantine and Arab practices reveals the vastness of the actual relationship between the two; the expression of attitudes and judgment speaks of the significance which not only Theophanes but Byzantines and Arabs attributed to each

uniqueness of person and the event of Jesus Christ; while the Islamic absolutism is based not on the prophetic quality of Muhammad, as some would rush to state, but on its questioning and rejecting any absolutism except that of the absolute being and existence of God! Here again we encounter one more point of convergence: that of absolutism – an oriental characteristic par excellence!<sup>79</sup>

Byzantine Christianity responded to the challenge of Islam in an anti-heretical manner by refuting its authenticity as a religion of revelation. In doing so the Byzantines did not aim at using refutation as a means of provoking war against Islam but rather as a way of defending Christianity and its Orthodoxy against a new "heresy". The distinction is significant as it renders theological controversy into a Greek-like polemic-dialectic exercise with an ultimate goal the conversion of the "heretic" to the "right path" on his own conviction; without this method turning necessarily the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature into something milder or reflecting this kind of spirit. Most Byzantine controversialists used Christianity as the criterion of measuring the authenticity of Islam while ignoring and disregarding the essence of the Islamic tradition itself; thence their view of Islam as a Christological heresy. The Byzantines, having gone through the long and heated Christological controversies, had excelled in the art of the anti-heretical argument in terms of format, intensity, style in speech and writing.<sup>80</sup> It is interesting that he who gave the anti-heretical impetus to the controversy against Islam was John of Damascus, a Christian in the court of Damascus, advisor to the caliph on matters of finance (possibly of war as well, according to some later sources), a man with a perceptive view

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other, etc.! Regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy, objectivity or subjectivity of reporting, what has to be noticed is the relationship between Byzantines and the Arabs that runs through the Chronography itself; one of the many oriental sources of Byzantine-Arab and Christian-Muslim relations! Cf. Theophanes, in *passim*. For a comprehensive view of the sources of the early period, see Thomas and Roggema (2009).

79 On this topic it would be of interest to examine the absolute expressions and notions found in the New Testament and in the Qur'ān.

80 For the general oriental context of the rise and development of Islam, see the still significant works by Bell (1968); O'Shaughnessy (1969); Trimmingham (1979). Some scholars have noticed Judaeo-Christian foundations and sources in Islam (Harnack [1914], 11 552), or even Gnostic Judaeo-Christian elements (Andrae [1955], 10). Others, like Wellhausen, Sprenger, and Hartmann agree that Nestorians and Monophysites, who were fleeing the Byzantine centres after their teachings had been condemned by Ecumenical Councils, became the source of influence on Islam. According to O'Leary, Nestorianism was the binding bond of Islam with Christianity as well as with Hellenism and the Greek civilization. O'Leary (1927) 137. The Qur'ān and the Hadith, not without reason, hint on Muhammad's relation with Christian monks and their influence on his life and faith. On the anti-heretical character of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, see Sahas (1990); Sahas (1996a). See Chapter 17 in this volume.

and existential sense of Islam who with his thought and his writing skills influenced generations of Christians; and of Muslim intellectuals as well.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, contrary to the West, the Byzantines came into contact with Islam from its very beginning, directly, through its own sources, understanding (albeit not agreeing with) its theses, treating it with a codified, expressive, malleable and spirited language – that of Byzantium and its sources – within a language and culture which was that of a vast Arab-speaking Christian population of their own Eastern provinces! Within a geographical proximity, a congenial cultural context, kinship and active everyday relationship, many Byzantines were willing and managed even to acquire knowledge and to develop an understanding of Islam and of its undercurrents, deeper and more comprehensive than of an average Muslim. This is not but a crucial and essential difference between Eastern and Western relationship with the Arabs and Islam.

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81 Some of our works on John of Damascus may be relevant in this context: Sahas (1972); Sahas (1984–1985); Sahas (1992); Sahas (2006).

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**PART 2**

*Historical Preambles under the Sting  
of the Arab Conquests*





## The Face to Face Encounter between Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the Caliph ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattāb: Friends or Foes?

The capitulation of Jerusalem to the Arabs, involving the encounter of Sophronius Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–8) with the second caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb (634–44) and the alleged covenant (*ahdnamēh*) granted to the Patriarch by ‘Umar as a way of securing for the Christians ownership of the holy sites, constitutes an interesting and intriguing footnote, and maybe a valuable chapter, in the earliest period of Christian-Muslim relations.<sup>1</sup> The historical details notwithstanding, this encounter affords an opportunity to concentrate on the two personalities and to evaluate the relationship that developed between them, speculative though this venture may appear to be.

The dynamics of encounters between people of faith, especially conflicting faiths, are determined by personal predisposition and chemistry. But these are hardly ever recorded, and one has to read between the lines of the written record, allowing the imagination to fill the gaps. Thus the reconstruction of the meeting between these representative men of faith, like the study of the collection of the Qur’ān, requires a synthesis of whatever historical fragments can be extracted ‘from stones and palm leaves’ and ‘from the hearts of men’, which is to say a kind of ‘psychological dissection’ of personality traits.

Sophronius’ stature, his talent with words, his impressive library (a product of his life at the monastery of St. Theodosius) which was copied and annotated by generations of writers, and especially his contemporaneity with the earliest Muslim conquests (events only scantily documented by Byzantine and Muslim sources), make him a particularly attractive figure and significant historical source.<sup>2</sup> His *Conciliar Letter*, or letter of credence which he sent to the

1 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, ‘Patriarch Sophronius, ‘Umar and the capitulation of Jerusalem’, and ‘The Covenant of ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb with the Christians of Jerusalem’ (Arabic translation), in Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Burhan Dajani, eds, *Al-sira al-islāmī al-faranjī ‘alā Filastīn fī l-qurūn al-wustā*, Beirut, 1994, pp. 53–71, and 72–7; see Chapters 9 and 10 in this volume; Heribert Busse, ‘Omar b. al-Hattāb in Jerusalem’, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5, 1984, pp. 73–119, and ‘Omar’s Image as the Conqueror of Jerusalem’, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8, 1986, pp. 149–68.

2 Cf. R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others saw it. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, 1997, pp. 67–73, and *passim*. On Sophronius,

synod of bishops in Constantinople on his election to the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem in 634,<sup>3</sup> communicates the fear of the Christian population and the impoverishment of religious life they experienced, as well as Sophronius' own shock at the 'revolt ... of all the barbarians, especially the Saracens ... who with raw and cruel disposition, impious and godless audacity were ravaging' the Christian community 'unexpectedly', ἀδοκίτως.<sup>4</sup> This 'ἀδοκίτως' betrays how much Sophronius and the neighbouring Christians, as well as Constantinople and the emperor Heraclius, had underestimated the social and religious upheaval which was brewing among the Arab tribes inside and outside Arabia. It points also to the military technique of surprise employed by 'Umar in the first wave of conquest.<sup>5</sup>

A few months after the *Conciliar Letter*, in December of the same year 634 (a date confirmed by internal evidence),<sup>6</sup> Sophronius delivered his *Christmas Sermon* in Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem.<sup>7</sup> In this Oration he lamented the apprehensiveness felt by Christians at travelling to the birthplace of Christ to celebrate his Nativity, because the city was in Arab hands. That was the first year of 'Umar's caliphate, the first year of his own episcopacy, and the earliest experience of the Arab conquests; hence the relatively mild character of his remarks, and the expression of hope that the Arabs would eventually be defeated once the Christians strengthened their faith in God and amended their conduct. A much more depressing situation had developed three years later when Sophronius was delivering his *Epiphany Sermon*<sup>8</sup> on January 6, 637, only a few months after the Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Yarmūk in

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cf. the authoritative monograph by Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem; vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, Paris, 1972.

- 3 G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Florence, vol. XI, pp. 461–510, and *PG*, vol. LXXXVII, cols 3148–3200.
- 4 Cf. *PG*, vol. LXXXVII, col. 3197D.
- 5 On the early Muslim conquests, cf. Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, 1981; Walter E. Kaegi Jr., *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge, 1992; D.J. Constantelos, 'The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries', *Byzantion* 42, 1972, pp. 326–57; Donald R. Hill, *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests, AD 634–656*, London, 1971; Hugh Kennedy, 'Change and Continuity in Syria and Palestine at the time of the Moslem Conquests', *ARAM*, 1, 1989, pp. 258–67; Felix-Marie Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d'Alexandre jusqu'à l'invasion arabe. Tome II<sup>e</sup>: De la guerre juive à l'invasion arabe*, Paris, 1952; Marius Canard, *L'expansion arabo-islamique et ses répercussions*, London, 1974.
- 6 Cf. Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jerusalem*, p. 103.
- 7 Ed. H. Usener, in *Rheinisches Museum* NF 41, 1886, pp. 500–16; reprinted in *Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* 1, Bonn, 1889, pp. 326–30.
- 8 Ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, vol. v, Brussels, 1963 (1888), pp. 151–68.



August 636. Damascus fell in that same year,<sup>9</sup> and Jerusalem capitulated a few months later, in February 638 (not in 635 as asserted by Busse).<sup>10</sup>

Abū ‘Ubayda Ibn al-Jarrāh the general who conducted the siege, offered either conversion to Islam or capitulation of the city and payment of taxes in exchange for the safe conduct of its inhabitants, or else war and, in the case of defeat, destruction. Violent assault on the city would have meant its devastation and most likely the disappearance of its holy sites.<sup>11</sup> The experience of the destruction of the city by the Persians twenty-five years earlier made fighting the Arabs unacceptable to its inhabitants. Conversion to Islam, or any conversion, was also beyond consideration. It is most doubtful whether Sophronius and his contemporaries had any knowledge of Islam, general or in any detail, of the kind that John of Damascus demonstrated decades later.<sup>12</sup> But even in the most general sense as a ‘Christian heresy’, Islam could not have been acceptable to a discerning theologian and a staunch Orthodox. Earlier, Sophronius had easily detected monophysitism in disguise in the politically motivated Monothelite compromise, a doctrinal heresy which he opposed vehemently. Emperor Heraclius had adopted Monothelitism for political purposes as a compromise position between the Chalcedonians and the Monophysite non-Chalcedonians. Pope Honorius I (625–38) had followed his lead, while Patriarchs Sergius I of Constantinople (610–38) and Cyrus of Alexandria (630–43) were Monothelites by conviction. Finally, the patriarchal throne of Antioch was at the time vacant. Sophronius’ stand on this doctrinal issue distinguished him as the only faithful Chalcedonian in the pentarchy of his day. Conversion, therefore, especially to a foreign doctrine, was out of the question. Furthermore, he knew almost nothing of the positive notions and claims with which Islam had embellished Jerusalem, as the city of the sacrifice of Abraham, the site from where Muḥammad had ascended to heaven as the Qur’an intimates (Q 17.1), the setting for the final judgment, and the honoured first *qibla* for all Muslims.

9 On this event, with reference to Arabic sources, cf. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, esp. ch. III, pp. 151–3.

10 “Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb in Jerusalem”, pp. 111–14. Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 64, n. 31.

11 Walled cities were safe havens for civilians and escaping troops alike. Three such cities, Damascus, Jerusalem and Caesarea Maritima, had proven havens for fleeing Byzantine troops after their defeat at Ajnādayn and the battle of Yarmūk. Such influxes created problems for the local population, which tended to abandon the city in order to avoid disease and food shortages. Sophronius’ Christmas and Epiphany sermons reflect the panic of the Christian population of Jerusalem at the Arab invasion and the incursion of fleeing troops; cf. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 100–1.

12 Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the ‘Heresy of the Ishmaelites’*, Leiden, 1972.

The option of capitulation in exchange for payment of taxes had a precedent, without being considered a treasonous act. Damascus had been surrendered by its bishop, or 'abbot', to Khālid Ibn al-Walid,<sup>13</sup> and in 641 the Patriarch of Alexandria delivered the city to 'Amr Ibn al-Ās. The caliphate of 'Umar was extremely successful from a military point of view, and the Muslims did not allow their foes to have truces except on terms advantageous to themselves.<sup>14</sup> Even so, it seems that it was not fear that led Sophronius to sanction the capitulation of Jerusalem, but a sense of realism. The resounding lack of Byzantine support for the beleaguered city made it a matter of urgency for him to take a decisive initiative.<sup>15</sup> He also chose capitulation without being aware of all the risks that such a choice could entail. The Muslim invasions had brought about a new wave of 'neomartyrs' for the Church and had revived the cult of saints, such as that of the indigenous St. Stephen.<sup>16</sup> After the capitulation of Jerusalem, Sophronius himself became a witness to martyrdom with the death of the sixty martyrs of Gaza.<sup>17</sup>

Sophronius' response to Abū 'Ubayda's terms was capitulation, but to 'Umar in person. What was the meaning of his demand? Was this a symbolic act of defiance towards Abū 'Ubayda, the offender of the Holy City? Had Sophronius some information on 'Umar's qualities as a person and ruler, which gave him reason to feel confidence in him? Was this posture another expression of Sophronius' independence of mind, and the exercise of an ethnarchic role in the absence of any other political or military authority? Or did he consider that surrendering Jerusalem demanded an official and ceremonial process as only befitted its importance and sacredness?<sup>18</sup> Clear evidence that will provide an answer to these questions is lacking, but a combination of all of the above makes Sophronius' demand natural. 'Umar received news of Sophronius' request while in Syria and responded immediately, arriving in Jerusalem riding

13 Cf. al-Baladhūri, *Futūh*, and the *vitae* of John of Damascus in Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 17 ff.

14 Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 239.

15 On this question, cf. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Why did Heraclius not defend Jerusalem, and fight the Arabs?', *Parole de l'Orient* 24, 1999, pp. 79–97. See Chapter 14 in this volume.

16 As Abel notes, 'Après la reddition de Jérusalem en février 638, dix d'entre eux sont décapités pour l'exemple devant les murs de la Ville sainte, assistés par le patriarche Sophrone qui recueille ensuite leurs dépouilles pour les ensevelir au lieu même sur lequel il fonda l'oratoire du proto-martyr Saint-Étienne'; *Histoire de la Palestine*, p. 404.

17 Cf. the Latin translation by Hippolyte Delehay, 'Passio Sanctorum Sexaginta Martyrum', *Analecta Bollandiana* 23, 1904, pp. 289–307. On this source, which has been used to revise the date of Sophronius' death to 639, cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 347–51.

18 Cf. Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, pp. 95–6.

on a camel.<sup>19</sup> No source takes Sophronius away from the city; they all bring 'Umar to the city. He camped at the Mount of Olives, and that is where he met the Patriarch. It is here that the capitulation of Jerusalem was signed in February 638.<sup>20</sup> He then proceeded to enter Jerusalem in what one may suggest resembled a pilgrimage, or an official entrance ceremony.<sup>21</sup>

Details of what followed the signing of the capitulation have been related by the learned physician and Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq (935–40).<sup>22</sup> His *Chronography* from Adam to the year 938 written in Arabic,<sup>23</sup> deals primarily with events of the history of the Church of Alexandria, and only in a cursory manner, a period of three-hundred years of Muslim rule. However, it provides interesting and unique information on events which he knew about such places as Antioch and Jerusalem. As a Monophysite, who stood theologically on the opposite side to the Chalcedonian Sophronius,

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- 19 The question as to how many times 'Umar came to Jerusalem and for what purpose is a matter of debate. According to Elias bar Shīnāya, bishop of Nisibis, 'Umar entered Jerusalem in 17 AH. He had come from Medina to al-Jabiya in the Golan in 16 or 17/637–8 for a number of purposes, one of which became to conclude a treaty with the people of Jerusalem; cf. *Opus Chronologium*, ed. Ernest W. Brooks, trans. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, Paris, 1910, pp. 133 (text), 64 (translation); also Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 151–2, and p. 321 n. 286, for the relevant sources.
- 20 Were there two phases in the signing of a single treaty, one at al-Jabiya with representatives of the people of Jerusalem (Christians and maybe Jews), and another with Patriarch Sophronius? Details regarding the phases and places of the actual signing of the treaty are confusing and contradictory. Some sources suggest that 'Umar negotiated a treaty with the people of Jerusalem at al-Jabiya (Gabithā) in the Golan between Damascus and Jerusalem. Some sources even identify it as the site of the battle of Yarmūk. Al-Jabiya had served as a place of retreat and regrouping for the Muslim troops between the first and second sieges of Damascus; cf. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 151–2, and 322, n. 287.
- 21 Cf. Shlomo D. Goiten, 'The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam', in his *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden, 1966, pp. 135–48.
- 22 On Eutychius, cf. Michel Breydy, *Études sur Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq et ses sources (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 450 = subs. 69)*, Louvain, 1983; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 442–3, giving further bibliography; also Sidney H. Griffith, 'Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a Tenth Century Moment in Christian Apologetics in Arabic', *Byzantion* 52, 1982, pp. 154–90. On the meaning of the name 'Baṭrīq' in the Arab sources, cf. Jean-Claude Cheynet, 'Notes Arabo-Byzantines', in *Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Νίκο Σβορώνο*, vol. 1, Rethymno: University of Crete, 1986, pp. 147–52.
- 23 *Eutychii patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, ed. L. Cheiko, 2 vols (CSCO 50, 51), Beirut, 1906–9; Latin translation in *PG* vol. CXXI, cols. 907–1156.

Eutychius had every opportunity to portray him, and ‘Umar, in the darkest possible colours. Instead, here is how he endeavours to record their encounter:<sup>24</sup>

When the gate of the city was opened ‘Umar came in with his entourage and sat at the *atrion* [= the area before the entrance] of the Church of the Resurrection. When the time of prayer approached ‘Umar said to Patriarch Sophronius: ‘I want to pray’. And he responded: ‘Commander of the Faithful, pray in the place where you are now’. And ‘Umar [said]: ‘I do not want to pray here.’ The Patriarch then led him to the church of Constantine [the Church of the Resurrection] where he spread a mat made of straw on the floor of the Church. But ‘Umar said: ‘I do not want to pray here either’. He went out to the steps which are at the gate on the eastern side of the Church of St. Constantine and he prayed alone on the steps. Then he sat down and said to Patriarch Sophronius: ‘Patriarch, do you know why I did not pray inside the Church?’ He answered: ‘I do not know, Commander of the Faithful’. And ‘Umar said to him: ‘If I had prayed inside the Church, you would be losing it and it would have gone from your hands because after my death the Muslims would seize it saying: “‘Umar has prayed here”. But give me a piece of *pergamene* to write for you a document.’ And he wrote that Muslims should not pray on the steps as a congregation, but individually, and that they should not gather here for the purpose of [communal] prayer, nor should be called together through the voice of a caller [*muezzin*]. And he gave it to the Patriarch ... Then ‘Umar left to visit Bethlehem. When the hour of prayer approached he prayed inside the Church under the western apse, which was completely decorated with a mosaic. ‘Umar wrote a document for the sake of the Patriarch, that the Muslims should not pray in this place, except individually, the one after the other, nor congregate here for the purpose of praying, nor should they be called by the voice of a caller for prayer, and that no form of this document should be altered.

Sophronius died shortly after the capitulation of Jerusalem, without leaving any note about the circumstances, or about his own feelings. Surrendering the Holy City must have been a painful act for him. It may not, therefore, be a coincidence that his death occurred only a few months, if not weeks, later. The

24 Cf. the Greek text of this narrative in I. Phokylides, “Ἡ ὀπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου ἀνακαλυφθεῖσα Ἀραβικὴ ἐπιγραφή”, *Nea Sion* 10, 1910, pp. 262–8, at 263–4; also Eugenius Michaelides, “Ἡ συνθήκη τοῦ Ὁμάρ μπέν αλ-Χαττάπ κατὰ τοὺς Ἀραβας ἱστοριογράφους”, *Nea Sion* 21, 1926, pp. 499–504, at 503–4.

date of his death has been placed, not without reason, at 11 March, 638.<sup>25</sup> He was a fighter proven in words and actions,<sup>26</sup> the only ecclesiastic in Syria and Palestine who did not perish fighting the Muslims and who, by facing 'Umar, extracted from him benefits for the Christians in the Holy Land.<sup>27</sup>

Eutychius' brief account of Sophronius' encounter with 'Umar dates, of course, from three hundred years after the event. One may suspect that such an account may be part of a lengthy Christian literature promulgated to safeguard the rights of the Christian community over the Holy Land and its sites.<sup>28</sup> However, it does also portray the sense of a unique rapport between two persons in one of the earliest Christian-Muslim encounters. The focal point of convergence between them is the event of prayer – a central component both of the life of an ascetic Patriarch and saint of the Church, and of an early caliph, *amīr al-mu'minīn*, a hero and saint of his faith, the 'St. Paul of Islam'.<sup>29</sup> Islamic

25 This date is not universally accepted; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 349–50. On account of the martyrdom of the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza (February, 638) and Sophronius' pastoral care of them, Schönborn has moved the date of Sophronius' death to the next year, 639, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, p. 97, n. 136, though his argument is not convincing. Less convincing is David Wood's theory that Sophronius died a martyr's death; 'The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem', *ARAM* 15, 2003, pp. 129–50. At no time has the Byzantine Church, which honours Sophronius as a saint, treated him as a martyr, something which would not have escaped its keen attention given the life and stature of the Patriarch and the inclination of the Church to identify as martyrs those who had died violently, especially during the period of the Arab invasions.

26 Cf. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 265.

27 The Greek sources on the conquest of Jerusalem portray an advantageous relationship of the Arabs towards the Christians in making Jerusalem remain a Christian city, as it had been up to that time. The alleged covenant of 'Umar with Sophronius is a case in point. The equivalent 'Jewish type' of record, which Goitein rejects, makes 'the information that the Caliph ['Umar] was accompanied by Jewish sages ... plausible'; Shlomo D. Goitein, 'Jerusalem in the Arab Period (638–1099)', *Jerusalem Cathedra* 2, 1982, p. 171. In fact, such 'accompaniment' proved to be effective as, in the words of Goitein, 'With the Arab conquest, a permanent Jewish population returned to Jerusalem after an absence of five hundred years', p. 169. The record shows a caliph intentionally impartial towards both communities, something which is confirmed by Sebeos and various Jewish texts. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 124ff. and 448ff.

28 A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus in his *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, vol. IV, Brussels, 1963 (1897) pp. 401–516, has edited from *Cod. Patriarch. 428* a series of such documents attributed to various Muslim authorities, beginning with Muḥammad (no. 1) and Mu'āwiya (no. 2): xx 'Παλαιαὶ Μεταφράσεις ἐνίων ἀραβικῶν τε καὶ τουρκικῶν ἐγγράφων περὶ τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων'.

29 For a brief and comprehensive portrait of 'Umar, see the entry 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb' in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Ithaca, NY, 1965, pp. 600–1. There might be some confusion between 'Umar I and 'Umar II in the popular Christian, and Muslim, tradition. Syriac chronicles (819, p. 15 and 846, p. 234) praise 'Umar as 'a kind man and a more

and Christian traditions both connect the name of 'Umar with holiness, piety and kindness. A similar tradition is attached to the name of Sophronius. In the context of this essay this is a significant and determining parallel!

'Umar was well aware of the centrality of prayer in the life of priests and monks. The Qur'ān makes a particularly complimentary mention of priests and monks who 'are not proud', but '*muslims*' in the generic sense of the word, and thus 'nearest in affection' to followers of Islam.<sup>30</sup> Sophronius was both, a priest (in fact, Archpriest) and a monk. One may wonder what impression 'Umar's request to perform his prayers made on the Patriarch who must certainly have been unaware of the importance and centrality of prayer at fixed times in the daily life of a Muslim.<sup>31</sup> At this early juncture the basic tenets and practices of Christianity were better known to Muslims than the tenets of Islam were to Christians. It makes for an interesting insight, however, to learn from Eutychius' note that Sophronius spread a prayer mat for 'Umar. As a spiritual man, Sophronius seemed to have had no difficulty whatsoever in understanding immediately 'Umar's need to pray, without inquiring or questioning him about the doctrinal details of his tradition. As an ascetic himself and a spiritual person,<sup>32</sup> he would have considered it natural that any place could be a place of prayer. As the head of a Patriarchate, he offered 'Umar a place for prayer in his own cathedral, the church of the Resurrection, and the church of Bethlehem!

Eutychius' account reveals a detail of the actual event here. Excluding the dawn prayer (*ṣubḥ*) and the late evening prayer (*ishā'*), and taking into consideration that according to the narrative 'Umar went to Bethlehem *on the same day* when another time of prayer occurred, one may surmise that the meeting

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compassionate king than all the kings before him', although *Chronicle* 1234, 1, p. 307 mentions that 'he persecuted the Christians more than the kings before him'; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 625, n. 84, and his translation of the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741* on pp. 611–30, at p. 625, §40.

30 Sūra 5 (*al-Mā'ida*), 82.

31 *Ṣubḥ* at dawn but before actual sunrise; *zuhr*, immediately after midday, 'aṣr between three and five o'clock in the afternoon; *maghrib* after sunset but before darkness; *ishā'*, any hour of darkness.

32 He joined the monastery of St. Theodosius in 619, after he had travelled extensively with his teacher and fellow itinerant John Moschus to numerous monastic centers in Palestine, Egypt and Rome, and had collected spiritual experiences and teachings which formed the *Pratum Spirituale*, the famous corpus of spiritual stories, sayings and anecdotes. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Saracens and Arabs in the *Leimon* of John Moschos', *Byzantiaka* 17, 1997, pp. 123–38, for the relevant bibliography. Election to the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem at the advanced age of seventy-four was an event 'forced physically' upon him, as he confesses himself while lamenting the loss of his former peaceful monastic endeavours, *PG*, vol. LXXXVII, cols 3148A–3149B.

in Jerusalem took place some time before the prayer of *zuhr*, *ʿaṣr* or, at the latest, *maghrib*. In any case, the essential point in the narrative is that the encounter took place in the context of prayer, with mutual appreciation of the prayer needs and requirements of each side. It is in this context also that Eutychius places the handing of an *ahdnamē*, or covenant of rights, to Sophronius by ʿUmar that sealed the agreement between the two leaders. ʿUmar returned to Jerusalem in 644 to begin a program of public buildings, particularly mosques,<sup>33</sup> dedicated in his honour with the name “Umarian” (*al-masājid al-ʿUmarīyya*). Many of them may actually have been former Byzantine churches converted into mosques with the name of ʿUmar attached as a tribute to him.<sup>34</sup>

Eutychius’ account of the encounter between Sophronius and ʿUmar allows also a second observation: the mutual acknowledgement and use of each other’s official title which describes the most essential manifestation of authority and quality of leadership (*zuhūr*)<sup>35</sup> in each community. ʿUmar knew that he was dealing with a Patriarch, and Sophronius with a ‘Commander of the Faithful’ (*amīr al-muʾminīn*), a title which had been assumed first by ʿUmar. If the alleged dialogue between the two is indeed historical, this is a most interesting item of evidence for its use! Eutychius’ account reflects an explicit mutual acceptance of the theocratic nature of authority which each figure represented,<sup>36</sup> but also an implicit exclusion of each other. In view of his reference to the Arabs as ‘barbarians’, to their war machine as the ‘Saracen sword’, and to their disposition as ‘cruel and beastly ... irreverent and ungodly daring spirit’,<sup>37</sup> one may ponder as to what were Sophronius’ actual feelings towards ʿUmar as a person and, therefore, whether the appellation *amīr al-muʾminīn* carried some meaning on his part, or it was simply a mere formality mixed with a deep seated conviction that ʿUmar represented the eye of the ‘axis of evil’! Eutychius seems to be on the side of sincerity and authenticity, and of the distinction made between the acts of the Arabs which were abhorrent to

33 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig, 1883–5, vol. 1, p. 342. Other evidence may suggest that ʿUmar returned to Jerusalem soon after his encounter with Sophronius, even before the death of the Patriarch; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 64–5, for relevant bibliography.

34 Cf. Phokylides, “Ἡ ὀπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας”, p. 268.

35 Cf. Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Heaven*, Princeton, 1997, p. 26, n. 51.

36 ʿUmar’s authority was based on the knowledge - originating in the heart of the community - of an undeniable and undisputed general consensus. It is interesting that ʿUmar was the implicit prototype in the Ibādī sources of ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Rustam, the first Rustamid, as the ideal Imam; cf. Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 59, and n. 89. The same kind of authority was afforded to and enjoyed by Sophronius.

37 *Synodical Letter*, PG, vol. LXXXVII, col. 3197D, and *Christmas Sermon*, ed. Usener, pp. 506–7.

Sophronius and the qualities of 'Umar which were equally demonstrable and attractive.<sup>38</sup>

Before Eutychius, Theophanes' (ca 752–818) record of Sophronius' encounter with 'Umar presents a contrast, but also a supplement, to his story. Relying mostly on Syriac sources, he records that at the first sight of 'Umar Sophronius exclaimed with disgust: 'In truth, this is the abomination of desolation established in the holy place, which Daniel the prophet spoke of'.<sup>39</sup> He was shocked at 'Umar's shabby appearance covered with 'a filthy camel-hair garment', and offered him a gown of his own 'until his cloak had been washed'. 'Umar at first refused the offer, but in the end he accepted. The seventy-eight year-old Patriarch must have been impressed by the humility of the forty-six year-old<sup>40</sup> warrior and caliph. The Muslims have retained a variation of this detail: a fourteenth century account has it that 'Umar was changed out of his dirty riding clothes by his officials and led into the city, whereupon the populace refused to accept him as the true caliph until he changed back.<sup>41</sup> The name of Sophronius, or of any other Christian authority, is understandably omitted in order to safeguard 'Umar's prominence.

Theophanes' record underlines the stark contrast between the two camps which Byzantine historiography, or imagination, wanted to preserve. At the same time it adds another tender and human touch in the encounter between Sophronius and 'Umar. The story has its origin in Theophilus of Edessa's (d. 785) *Syriac Common Source*, which subsequently became the source used by Theophanes, Dionysius of Tell Maḥre, and Agapius of Manbij for events dating between the years 590 and 750.<sup>42</sup> However, the only early Greek chronicle on the subject which is independent of Theophanes, the *Historia Syntomos*

38 In the history of the Eastern Christian encounter with Islam there are many examples of allowing explicit distinction and respect for Islam as *theoseveia* (true reverence for God) and a Muslim person on the one hand, and condemning and rejecting communal behaviour on the other. A characteristic case is that of Gregory Palamas (1296–1360), the well-known spiritual leader, Hesychast and Archbishop of Thessalonica, who called upon his flock to inculcate the Islamic reverence for God while rejecting as 'barbarian' the conduct of the Muslim Turks who had held him in captivity; cf. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25, 1980, pp. 409–36; and *idem*, 'Gregory Palamas on Islam', *The Muslim World* 73, 1983, pp. 1–21.

39 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, vol. I, p. 339 (referring to Daniel 9.27; cf. 1 Maccabees 1.54 and 6.7).

40 'Umar converted to Islam in 618, at the age of twenty six, four years before the *hijra*.

41 Cf. R. Ebied and D. Thomas, ed and trans., *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades, The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Tālib al-Dimashqī's Response*, Leiden, 2005, pp. 176–9.

42 Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 400–9, 639 and n. 45.



(*Breviarium*) of Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople (806–15), written probably between the years 775 and 787,<sup>43</sup> is completely silent on the whole episode, though the author's silence may reflect the Constantinopolitan attitude towards the 'smallest' and by then fallen Patriarchate. In any event, Christian and Islamic tradition seem on the whole not to want to contradict the gist and spirit of Eutychius' version, which has prevailed among the Christian Oriental historians and chronographers; Nectarios of Crete, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1660 to 1669, repeats Eutychius' version,<sup>44</sup> making 'Umar enter the city as pilgrim rather than as conqueror.

This encounter may belong more to comparative Culture than to History. However, for lack of hard historical evidence on that earliest period of contact between Christianity and Islam, we are obliged (perhaps even privileged) to view any such crumbs of history at least as phenomena which may 'preserve' or, by their own force, even obliterate historical evidence. In either circumstance, their value for the history of Muslim-Christian relations is undeniable.

43 Cf. Cyril Mango, *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History, Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Washington DC, 1990, § 20–27. No literature on Islam in the seventh century comes from Constantinople.

44 Nektarios of Crete (1602–76), Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Επιτομή τῆς Ἱεροκοσμικῆς Ἱστορίας*, Athens (1677), 1980, pp. 282–3.

## Patriarch Sophronius, ‘Umar, and the Capitulation of Jerusalem

The capitulation of Jerusalem (638) to ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb by its Patriarch Sophronius I (634–638/9) is not an unknown incident of history. However, the event and its details have been passed over in haste by historians and religionists, mostly because of lack of adequate sources.<sup>1</sup> The capitulation of Jerusalem merits an examination from the side of Sophronius’ own personality and life (ca. 550–638/9), a turbulent period of time, for the sake of the interest it holds in matters of the history of Byzantine-Muslim relations (in fact, of Byzantine-Jewish-Muslim relations as it is the case); in the same way as the life and the times of Sophronius have been examined for the significant interest they hold in matters of monasticism, spirituality and doctrinal theology.<sup>2</sup> Interesting information can be extracted from congenial sources, and from the writings of the ascetic Patriarch to explain his personality, his view of the Arab conquests, his motives to capitulate the City, his attitude towards Islam, and his personal rapport with ‘Umar.

Three things are emerging from such a close study: a) that the capitulation of Jerusalem in 638 takes a different meaning under the light of its previous at not too distant a past destruction by the Persians in 614, both events being contemporaneous to the reign of the same Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610–641); b) that the personalities of Sophronius and ‘Umar, and the rapport between these two men of piety and prayer,<sup>3</sup> had much to do with the capitulation itself and the manner in which it was conducted; and c) that both these situations point to the beginning of a new era of relations among the *ahl-al-Kitāb*, and to an opportunity arising for the Christians of Jerusalem to contain the Jews, with the help of the Arab Muslims through special privileges granted to them and enshrined in the alleged *akht-name*, or covenant of privileges of ‘Umar. Related

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- 1 Among the most comprehensive modern reconstructions of this event, with reference mainly to Arabic sources, is that by Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), esp. ch. III.8, pp. 151–3.
  - 2 Cf. the authoritative monograph by Christoph von Schönborn *Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972).
  - 3 Different profiles of ‘Umar and evaluations of his personality emerge from various accounts of the conquest of Jerusalem and other activities of ‘Umar which have been discussed in a separate, yet unpublished, study of ours.

and equally important issues are the significance of Jerusalem for the Persians and the Arabs, the Byzantine imperial policy towards the holy city, and the relations of Patriarch Sophronius with the rest of the Patriarchal sees.

But who is this Sophronius? There is little doubt now that Sophronius “the Sophist” and Sophronius the Patriarch of Jerusalem, considered before as two different personalities, is one and the same person. He was born in Damascus. The exact time of his birth is still under debate between an earlier (ca. 550) and a later (ca. 560) date. The epithet “Sophist” (professor of rhetoric) reflects the reputation he attained as a man of exceptional rhetorical skills, philosophy, and logic from his illustrious birthplace. He lived at a time when monasticism was flourishing in Palestine and the monasteries had become centres of intellectual cultivation and spiritual renewal. He never married. At an early age he visited as a layman the monastery of St. Theodosius near Jerusalem, famous for its strict monastic canon and its elders. There he met a relative of his, named also Sophronius, and John Moschus a man absorbed by the monastic life and its ideals. Sophronius and Moschus became very close friends, so much so that when Moschus was assigned as part of his monastic duty to visit monasteries and hermitages in the Christian world of the Middle East, he invited Sophronius to accompany him. Perhaps Moschus needed Sophronius as a literary companion, or he sensed his potentialities as a monk and wanted to attract him to the monastic life this way. In fact, after their return from their first journey to Egypt (578/9–584) Sophronius decided to embrace monasticism and become a member of the monastic community of St. Theodosius. Moschus and Sophronius undertook five different journeys which brought them though Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, Syria, North Africa and Rome. While in Rome Moschus died (519) and Sophronius was left with the painful task of bringing the body of his beloved brother and spiritual father back to St. Theodosius for burial. It is after the death of Moschus that Sophronius undertook the editorial care of the stories, anecdotes and sayings, which he and Moschus had collected during their almost forty years long journeys, into an anthology under the name *Leimon* (“Meadow”) widely read in the Christian world and known in the West by the Latin name *Pratum Spirituale*.<sup>4</sup> Sophronius, a staunch Orthodox, with his companion Moschus, undertook the defence of the Chalcedonian doctrine regarding the two nature in Christ against those moderate Monophysites who were promulgating the doctrine that in the person of Christ were two

4 PG 87.3: 2852–3112. For an extensive report on its ms. tradition and translations, see Henry Chadwick “John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist”, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25 (1974) 41–74; reprinted in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982, # XVIII.

natures but one will (Monothelism) and one energy (Monoenergyism). Monothelism seemed to many, and particularly to emperor Heraclius and prominent Church officials at the time, as offering a compromise position between the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians. In their journeys Sophronius and Moschus promulgated the diothelite theology and tried to persuade Monothelite hierarchs and monks of their error. Sophronius went even to Constantinople to convince Patriarch Sergius (610–638) of the heretical nature of the Monothelite doctrine to which he adhered, but to no avail. When in December 634 Patriarch Modestus of Jerusalem died Sophronius was still in Constantinople. On his return he was pressured to undertake the throne of Jerusalem, which he reluctantly accepted. According to canonical order, he immediately submitted a statement of his faith and that of his Church, in the form of a *Synodical Letter*, to the Patriarch and the Synod of Bishops of Constantinople. It is doubtful that he submitted such a Letter to Pope Honorius of Rome. At the time Emperor Heraclius and three out of the five ecclesiastical sees of the Christian Pentarchy (Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria) were occupied by Monothelite Patriarchs. The throne of Antioch was vacant. Thus, Sophronius was the only orthodox, Diothelite Patriarch.

Soon after his ascension to the Patriarchal throne Palestine and the countryside of Jerusalem itself were under Arab Muslim attack. It was the fate of Sophronius to defend the city alone and in the end to deliver it to 'Umar in 638. He died a few months later.

## 1 The Fall of Jerusalem to the Persians and to the Arabs

The event of the capitulation of Jerusalem by Sophronius to the Arabs must be seen under the light of the previous conquest of the city by the Persians twenty five years earlier, in 614. In a more general way it must be seen also under the light of the make-up and the socio-political developments which were taking place in the region since that date; that is, the alliance of the Persians with the North and North-eastern Arabian tribes (the Lakhmids), the alliance of the Byzantines with the North-western Arabian tribes (the Ghassānids), and the rising in strength of the third block which was controlled by the South Arabian kingdoms.<sup>5</sup> The conflict among these socio-military blocks had an immediate bearing upon the political and military developments in the region at the time of Sophronius. As in the early part of the seventh century the walls of

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<sup>5</sup> For these alliances and their influence in the developments in the area, see Donner, *Conquests*, 37 ff.

the two alliances gave way to pressures from either one or the other block, or from within its own confines, the power of the nomadic groups was unleashed enabling the nomads to indulge in destructive raids and pillage on settlements far outside the realm of their control, into the area of Jordan and even near the walls of Jerusalem itself.<sup>6</sup> It is such raids against Jerusalem and the monasteries of Judaea, including the lavra of Mar Sabbas, which Sophronius had in mind when in 634 he delivered his eloquent Christmas oration on the occasion of “the disorder of the Saracens and their destructive revolt”.<sup>7</sup> The raids were extensive and destructive enough to have been recorded by Theophanes who has reported that “the Saracens campaigned against Syria, and they withdrew [only] after they had plundered a number of villages”.<sup>8</sup> At this stage Sophronius does not appear to be aware of the Arabs as Muslims; and the “Saracens” he is referring to are the Arab tribes from Nabataea, Sinai, S. Palestine and Arabia.

By the time of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614, Islam had already been stirring Arabia and the Arab tribes for at least two, if not more, years since the “Night of Power and Excellence” (610 or 612). The rise of Islam must be seen as part of the general uprising, ascertaining the identity of the Arab population in Arabia proper, in Palestine and in Syria at large.<sup>9</sup> We may want to suggest with Theophanes that a struggle had started between the Persians and the Arab Saracens for the conquest of the heart and the land of Syria! In the three-way power struggle the Byzantines were the most vulnerable; at least in the eyes of the Arabs and the Syrian Christians. Only in 612 “the Persians had trampled on Asia, captured its cities, and destroyed the Roman army in their battles”,<sup>10</sup> and in 613/4, “they captured Damascus, taking many prisoners”.<sup>11</sup> Immediately after the fall of Damascus, Sophronius’ birthplace, the culminating point in the Byzantino-Persian conflict was the conquest of Jordan and Palestine including Jerusalem itself, where “The Persians captured and led off to Persia Zachariah

6 Donner, *Conquests*, 48. Cf. also Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Carolus de Boor, vol. 1 (Lipsiae: 1883; 1963), p. 300; English translation, *The Chronicle of Theophanes. An English translation of anni mundi 6095–6305 (AD 602–813), with introduction and notes*, by Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 11. Cf. also D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the study of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), pp. 156–7.

7 On the sermon, see below.

8 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300; Turtledove, 11.

9 We have dealt with the rise of Arab consciousness and its independence from the Byzantine Imperial Court in our “The Seventh century in the Byzantine-Muslim relations. Characteristics and forces”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, (see Chapter 16 in this volume).

10 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300; Turtledove, 10.

11 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300; Turtledove, 11.

the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the precious and lifegiving wood [i.e. the cross of Christ], and many prisoners".<sup>12</sup>

At that time Sophronius was in Egypt where he composed two anacreontic odes lamenting the destruction of the holy city.<sup>13</sup> An important, but not insignificant detail to keep in mind in this context, is the Jewish factor in the conquest of Jerusalem, which Sophronius mentions explicitly in the first Ode. In his mind the role of the Jewish population in the destruction of Jerusalem was prominent:

The foreigners and the inhabitants of Jerusalem seek God's friendship [or mercy].... When they saw the Persians in front of them, together with their Jewish friends, they ran immediately and conquered the gates of the city.<sup>14</sup>

The note is repeated by Theophanes in more details:

at the hands of the Jews they [the Persians] killed many people in it: as some say, 90,000. The Jews, according to their means, bought the Christians and then killed them.<sup>15</sup>

12 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300–1; Turtledove, 11.

13 The first and longer ode consists of eighty eight verses divided into twenty four units, as many as the letters of the Greek alphabet, arranged in alphabetical order and each one beginning with a letter of the Greek alphabet. All the verses consist of two lines except Γ (7)5, Π (29) and Ψ (14). Two letters, Π and Ω are missing. The ode is written in two columns, but each line follows each other horizontally from left to right! The second ode consists of only twelve double-line verses. Text of both odes in Ioannes Phokylides, "Ἰωάννης ὁ Μόσχος καὶ Σωφρόνιος ὁ Σοφιστὴς καὶ Πατριάρχης Ἱεροσολύμων", *Nea Sion* (1914) 199–201. Earlier edition by L. Ehrhard in *Programm des Stephansgymnasiums in Strasbourg*, 1887; and Graf Couret, *Révue de l'Orient Chrétien* 2 (1807), 133 ff. We have no access to these last two editions for comparison.

14 Phokylides, "Ἰωάννης ὁ Μόσχος", *Nea Sion* 14 (1914) p. 200. On the role of the Jewish community in the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and on the fate of this temporary Jewish-Persian alliance, see K. Hilkwitz "The participation of the Jews in the conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians, 614 AD" (in Hebrew), *Zion*, 4 (1939) 307–316; Greek translation from an English translation by Timotheos Patriarch of Jerusalem, in *Nea Sion* 35 (1940) 405–420, where also a discussion of the sources pertinent to the events: Sophronius, Sabeus, Euty chius, Strategius, an unknown Armenian historian, Antiochus monachus, Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus. According to Hilkwitz, Sophronius remains the main source on the participation of the Jews in the conquest of Jerusalem, while Strategius must generally be trusted for the narration regarding the Jewish role in its destruction. *Nea Sion* (1940), p. 417.

15 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300–1; Turtledove, 11.

After Jerusalem the Persians proceeded (615/6) to conquer “all Egypt, up to Ethiopia, Alexandria and Libya”.<sup>16</sup> Heraclius’ victory over the Persians some fifteen years later (629), which resulted in the eventual retrieval of the cross and the return of Patriarch Zachariah to Jerusalem, was certainly significant but a self-contained one.

Events such as these must have been traumatic for the intellectual-contemplative Sophronius. His own illustrious birthplace, Damascus, had been captured by the Persians and shortly after that Jerusalem. Twenty years later history was to repeat itself with the Muslim Arabs attacking Jerusalem after they had taken Damascus! Thus, Sophronius experienced two conquests of Jerusalem within twenty five years of his life.

### 1.1 *The Arab Conquest of Jerusalem*

On July 30, 634 at Ajnadayn near Lydda, Theodore, Heraclius’ brother, fell in battle and his army was dispersed. It is then that the Arabs spread over the open countryside. On Christmas Eve, 634 Sophronius delivered in Jerusalem his Christmas Sermon lamenting that because of the “Saracen revolt” the Christians cannot travel out of the city to celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem. Shlomo D. Goitein<sup>17</sup> maintains that “Gaza was the first objective in the war of conquest” and that “Jerusalem was remote from Arab conquest”. His assertion is based on the assumption that “The Arab invaders did not move against Jerusalem initially, for in desert conquest Bedouin generally seek to conquer areas they frequent for purposes of *trade or accompanying convoys*”.<sup>18</sup>

However, Jerusalem had been known to the Arabs and Islam had associated itself with it from its earliest moments. The sanctity and significance of Jerusalem for the Muslims can never be overemphasized, even by non-Muslims.<sup>19</sup> It is the city of the prophets, the first *qibla* of Islam, the city to which Muhammad was transported miraculously from Mecca, ascended into heaven (*miraj*) and was received as a prophet by the previous prophets and, ultimately, by God himself.<sup>20</sup> All along Jerusalem had been for the Muslims not

16 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300; Turtledove, 11.

17 “Jerusalem in the Arab period (638–1099)”, *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 2 (1982), 168–196, at 170.

18 *Ibid.* Emphasis is ours.

19 Cf. S.D. Goitein, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam”, in his *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), pp. 135–48; and Meir J. Kister, “A Comment on the Antiquity of Traditions Praising Jerusalem”, *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981), 185–6.

20 Q. 18:1; on the *miraj* see Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and his Ascension* (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1955).

only a major spiritual magnet, but its conquest a target also of challenge and competition with the rest of the “people of the Book” as a proof as to which one represents the purest form of monotheism. On this score, it is neither surprising nor coincidental that Jerusalem is believed by Muslims, Jews and Christians alike to be the place where the day of Judgement will take place!<sup>21</sup>

The siege of the city<sup>22</sup> started during the third phase of the conquest<sup>23</sup> under Abū ‘Ubayda, supported by a number of able commanders and conquerors of Syrian cities, such as Yazid b. Abī Sufyān, Mu‘ādh b. Jabal, Khālid Ibn al-Walīd and ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās. Inside the walls Sophronius was defending the city, keeping the spirit of the people alive hoping for assistance from Constantinople; which never came. Was such inaction connected with the differences and the doctrinal disputes between Heraclius and Sophronius? Or had the Byzantines underestimated the Arabs and the actual danger which Jerusalem was facing, and the repercussions which the fall of Jerusalem would have on the rest of the Eastern provinces? The least that one can suggest, along with Theophanes, is that Heraclius had been personally embarrassed by the tone and the content of Sophronius’ *Synodical Letter* to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, a Syrian by birth and allegedly the son of Monophysite parents.<sup>24</sup> In these Letters the erudite Patriarch was exposing Monothelitism as a heresy.<sup>25</sup> Sophronius’ previous theological struggles against Monothelitism had forced Heraclius, in the tradition of the *Henoticon* of Zeno, to promulgate an Edict by which he was ordering a moratorium on any further squabbling in favour or against the one or two wills in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

But it was the military realities which must have contributed to Heraclius’ inaction. According to Theophanes it was during the third year of Sophronius’

21 The Jewish belief that the resurrection, which will begin with the Messiah, will start from the Holy Land and in fact from the Temple, allows for re-interment, and only for Jews buried in the diaspora. See Isaiah Gafni, “Reinterment in the Land of Israel: Notes on the Origin and Development of the Custom”, *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981), 96–104.

22 Whether the siege itself lasted for a long period of time, or it was only a short one which took place just before 638, is still under debate. The sources seem to point to a lengthy surrounding of the vicinity and to a rather short siege of the city itself.

23 Donner, *Conquests*, pp. 151–2.

24 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 330; Turtledove, 32. Mistakenly Theophanes calls this Pope John [John IV, 640–642] Turtledove, 32, n. 70.

25 “When he heard this [the sending of the Letter], Herakleios was ashamed. He did not want to dissolve his own creations, but could not stand censure either”. *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 330; Turtledove, 32. Heraclius had already, on the advice of Sergius, instructed Athanasius of Hierapolis, whom he had promised to make Patriarch of Antioch, to confess two conjoined matters in Christ, “one natural will and energy in Christ” [*Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 330; Turtledove, 31] which was also the faith of Sergius!

26 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 330; Turtledove, 32, n.73.



patriarchate (636/7) that, in spite of the victory of his brother Theodore against the Arabs near Emesa, "Heraclius had despaired and abandoned Syria; he took the precious wood from Jerusalem and went off to Constantinople".<sup>27</sup> Heraclius' farewell to Syria after the battle of Yarmūk (20 August 636) is expressive of his personal disappointment, signalling also the end of the Byzantine military involvement in the region: "Peace unto thee, O Syria, and what an excellent country this is for the enemy".<sup>28</sup> In taking away the cross, Heraclius was giving perhaps a strong signal that he was expecting the fall of Jerusalem as inevitable, and that as emperor of the Christian empire he was prepared to tolerate it. Thus Sophronius was wrong in expecting support from Byzantium; something which, in itself, shows the difference between the Palestinian and the Constantinopolitan mentality and more particularly between the monastic, intellectual and idealist Patriarch on the one hand and the military-minded Byzantine court on the other. It is remarkable, although not surprising for the meek and enduring character of Sophronius, that in spite of opposition he had experienced from the imperial court – the coveting of the throne of Jerusalem, the Monothelite contamination of Palestine, the indifference over the Arab invasions – the aged Patriarch was emphatically pleading in his *Synodical Letter* for orthodoxy and unity, so that the Christian Empire may resist the Arab onslaught, and the Christian emperor may ultimately triumph! From this Letter one can extract Sophronius' perception of the Arab invasions as being a) totally unwarranted and unexpected (ἀδοκῆτως); b) fierce, destructive and inspired by a godless daring spirit (θηριώδει φρονήματι καὶ δυσσεβεῖ καὶ ἀθέῳ πολυμήματι); and c) as a passing phenomenon, over which the "pious Byzantine kings" would prevail as others had done before (καθὰ τὸ πρότερον).<sup>29</sup>

The Arab attacks on Jerusalem forced the population and its Patriarch to remain confined within the walls. On Christmas Day, December 25, 634 which happened to fall on a Sunday, Sophronius, unable to celebrate the feast in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, delivered a sermon at the Church of the Theotokos in Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> In this magnificent Oration he laments the

27 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 337; Turtledove, 37.

28 Al-Baladhūri, *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, transl. P.K. Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), p. 210. George Ostrogorsky describes the impact of the loss of Syria on Heraclius with these telling words: "His life's work collapsed before his eyes. The heroic struggle against Persia seemed to be utterly wasted, for his victories here had only prepared the way for the Arab conquest". *History of the Byzantine State*, transl. by Joan M. Hussey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 99.

29 PG 87,3: 3197C–3200A.

30 Ed. Herman Usener, in *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* (Frankfurt am Main) 41 (1886), 501–515; reprinted by Ioannes Phokylides, in *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* (Alexandria) 17 (1918) 369–370; text 371–386. Latin and incomplete translation, in PG 87,3: 3201–3212.

capture of Bethlehem and the predicament of the Christians who were forced to celebrate the birth of Christ away from his birthplace.<sup>31</sup> In another sermon delivered a few days after this Christmas Sermon on 6 January 635 on the occasion of the Epiphany day,<sup>32</sup> Sophronius asks rhetorically, “Why do wars happen to us? Why do the barbarian assaults multiply? Why do Saracen troops rise against us?” His own answer is, because of the sins of the Christians who have deviated from the faith and conduct willed by God.

The Arab assault on Jerusalem and its siege became a prolonged affair thanks to the stamina of the inhabitants and to Sophronius’ inspiration. The sieging general Abu ‘Ubayda proposed three terms: conversion to Islam, or capitulation and paying of taxes, or destruction of the city. Conversion to Islam was beyond consideration. Also the experience of the destruction of the city by the Persians twenty five years earlier made fighting against the Arabs and risking destruction of the holy places equally unacceptable. Sophronius chose capitulation, but only to ‘Umar personally.<sup>33</sup> Goitein seems to reject this point. Without referring to Sophronius but simply to “the residents”, he gives a legendary twist to such a claim by saying that, the transfer of the Holy City from Christian to Muslim control prompted an historiographical tendency, that increased in later generations. It embellished the conquest by the Arabs with legends and imaginary stories, according to which only the most illustrious military figures had been engaged in the various stages of the conquest. When

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31 The Sermon provides us with information about the state of the Muslim expansion and about Jerusalem under siege.

32 Ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta*, vol. v. (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilization, 1963, [1888]), pp. 151–168. Schönborn sees a difference in force regarding the Arab invasions between the Synodical Letter (in which there is still hope that the Byzantine emperor may triumph over the Arabs) and the pessimistic tone of the Sermon on the Epiphany. On the basis of this difference in textual style he suggests that Sophronius must have been elected Patriarch in the earliest days of 634. *Sophrone*, pp. 90–1.

33 Capitulation and paying of taxes was not seen as a treasonous act. Damascus was capitulated (636) by the bishop or an “abbott”, and the grandfather of John of Damascus, Mansūr ibn Sargūn. Cf. al-Baladhūri, *Futūh* and the *vitae* of John of Damascus. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “heresy of the Ishmaelites* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 17 ff. Three years after Jerusalem, the Patriarch of Alexandria did exactly the same (641).

Capitulation of a city did not guarantee absolute safety for the people. Writes F.-M. Abel: “Après la reddition de Jérusalem en février 638, dix d’entre eux sont décapités pour l’exemple devant les murs de la Ville sainte, assistés par le patriarche Sophrone qui recueille ensuite leurs dépouilles pour les ensevelir au lieu même sur lequel il fonda l’oratoire du proto-martyr Saint-Étienne”. *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion Arabe* (Paris: 1952), p. 404. The Muslim invasions revived the cult of saints and martyrs with a new wave of “neomartyrs”. The connection of these martyrs with St. Stephen the proto-martyr, is significant.

the City was about to fall, the residents insisted Caliph 'Umar himself come from distant Arabia<sup>34</sup> so that the City could be handed over to him, as it is written: "And Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one" (Isaiah 10:34) "and Jerusalem is not handed over other than to a king who is fit to be called a mighty one" (B *Gitten*, 56b). On the basis of these legends, we can accompany 'Umar as he entered the city, hear what was said by and to him, learn details of his covenant with the local people, and so on. In reality, due to the minimal strategic and administrative importance of the city, very little reliable information has remained about the course of the conquest and the first centuries of Jerusalem under Muslim rule.<sup>35</sup>

Goitein seems to underestimate the religious, emotional and spiritual importance of Jerusalem for Christians and Muslims, indigenous and itinerant ones, by not wanting to read whatever meagre sources we possess under this light. If one recognizes the fundamental importance of the holy places and of Jerusalem for the Christians, and takes into account the demographic realities of the times, one then can understand Sophronius' demand to meet with 'Umar personally, his rapport and covenant with him, and find these records making historical sense and having a historical core.

By capitulating Jerusalem to the Arabs, Sophronius was not simply protecting it physically; he was also keeping it from becoming a Jewish city, after having been a Christian city for five hundred years, as well as preserving the Christian sites from falling into Jewish hands! If Sophronius was interested only in the temporary physical protection of the city, he could have capitulated it to 'Umar's deputy.

## 2 Sophronius and 'Umar

Did Sophronius know 'Umar, or of him? Was his demand to deal with him directly an expression of the ethnarchic role of the Christian Patriarch in the absence of any other Byzantine political or military authority? Or was this a symbolic act of defiance for Abū 'Ubayda who was the offender of the holy city? Perhaps, and to some degree, all of the above. 'Umar who was in Syria<sup>36</sup>

34 'Umar was already in Syria when he was recalled to take charge of Jerusalem.

35 "Jerusalem in the Arab period", p. 169.

36 According to Elias bar Shināya, Bishop of Nisibis (*Opus Chronologium*, p. 133 in text, or p. 64 in translation), 'Umar entered Jerusalem in A.H.17. 'Umar had come from Medina to al-Jābiya in the Golan in A.H.16 or 17/AD 637–638 to do a number of transactions. Concluding a treaty with the people of Jerusalem became then one of them. Cf. Donner, *Conquests*, p.151 and the relevant sources.

received a message and arrived immediately in Jerusalem riding on a camel. He camped at the Mount of Olives, where he invited the Patriarch to meet him. It is there that the capitulation of Jerusalem was signed (February, 638).<sup>37</sup> ‘Umar then proceeded to enter Jerusalem. Eutychius (Sa’id b. al-Batriq),<sup>38</sup> the monophysite Patriarch of Alexandria (933–940), describes in some detail the meeting between ‘Umar and Patriarch Sophronius after the opening of the gates.<sup>39</sup> In this context one has to remember that, as a monophysite, Eutychius stood theologically on the opposite side of the Chalcedonian Sophronius and thus, as the case has often been, he had the opportunity and every reason to portray him and ‘Umar with the darkest possible colours.

When the gate of the city was opened ‘Umar came in with his entourage and sat at the *atrion*<sup>40</sup> of the Church of the Resurrection. When the time of prayer approached<sup>41</sup> ‘Umar said to Patriarch Sophronius: “I want to pray”. And he responded: “Ruler of the faithful,<sup>42</sup> pray in the place where you are now”. And ‘Umar [said]: “I do not want to pray here”. The Patriarch then led him to

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- 37 Were there two phases of a treaty signing, one at al-Jābiya with representatives of the people of Jerusalem (Christians? Jews?), and another with Patriarch Sophronius? Sources mentioned by Donner (*Conquests*, p. 322, n. 287), indicate that ‘Umar negotiated a treaty with the people of Jerusalem al-Jābiya (Gabithā) in the Golan, between Damascus and Jerusalem. Al-Jābiya had served as a place of retreat and regrouping of the Muslim troops after the first siege and before the second siege of Damascus. Some sources even identify it with the place where the battle at Yarmūk took place. Cf. Donner, *Conquests*, pp. 151–2.
- 38 Eutychios wrote a *Chronography* in Arabic. Latin translation in PG 111:907–1156. The work has also been re-edited in the *Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientaliūm* (Arabic text with translation). On the meaning of the name “Batriq” in the Arab sources, see Jean-Claude Cheynet, “Notes Arabo-Byzantines”, in *Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Νίκο Σβορώνο*, vol. 1, (Rethymno: University of Crete) pp. 147–152.
- 39 Greek text of this narrative in I. Phokylides, “Ἡ ὀπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου ἀνακαλυφθεῖσα Ἀραβικὴ ἐπιγραφή”, *Nea Sion* 10 (1910) 262–268, at 263–264. Another translation of the same narrative by Eugenius Michaelides, “Ἡ συνθήκη τοῦ Ὁμάρ μπέν ἀλ-Χαττάπ κατὰ τοὺς Ἀραβας ἱστοριογράφους”, in *Nea Sion* 21 (1926) 499–504, at 503–4. The *Chronographia* deals primarily with events pertinent to the history of the Church of Alexandria. It provides, however, reliable information on events taken place in Antioch and Jerusalem, in Eutychius’ relative proximity.
- 40 A covered court or portico in front of the principal door of the church.
- 41 The times of prayer are fixed as follows: *subh* at dawn but before actual sunrise; *zuhr*, immediately after mid-day; *‘usr*, between three and five o’clock in the afternoon; *maqhrīb*, after sunset but before darkness; *ishā’*, any hour of darkness. Excluding the first and the last prayer time, and taking into consideration that on the same day ‘Umar, according to the same narrative, went to Bethlehem and there came also the time of prayer, one may want to surmise that this conversation took place just before the time of one of the other three time periods.
- 42 *Amir al-mu’minin*. The title was assumed first by ‘Umar. It is interesting that Sophronius is presented as knowing this detail at such an early stage of Islamic history; or that Eutychius was aware that such a title was used by ‘Umar!

the church of Constantine<sup>43</sup> where he spread a mat made of straw on the floor of the Church. But 'Umar said: "I do not want to pray here either". He went out to the steps which are at the gate on the eastern side of the Church of St. Constantine and he prayed alone on the steps. Then he sat down and said to Patriarch Sophronius: "Patriarch, do you know why I did not pray inside the Church?" He answered: "I do not know, ruler of the faithful". And 'Umar said to him: "If I had prayed inside the Church, you would be losing it and it would have gone from your hands because after my death the Muslims would seize it saying: "'Umar has prayed here". But give me a piece of pergamene to write for you a document". And he wrote that Muslims should not pray on the steps as a congregation, but individually, and that they should not gather here for the purpose of [communal] prayer, nor should they be called together through the voice of a caller [*muezzin*]. And he gave it to the Patriarch ... Then 'Umar left to visit Bethlehem. When the hour of prayer approached he prayed inside the Church under the western apse, which was completely decorated with a mosaic. 'Umar wrote a document for the sake of the Patriarch, that the Muslims should not pray in this place, except individually, the one after the other, not to congregate here for the purpose of praying nor should they be called through the voice of a caller for prayer, and that no form of this document should be altered.

The details of the account reveal an interesting understanding of and relations with Islam at the time. According to this account, Sophronius understood 'Umar's need to pray without questioning him as to his faith. As an ascetic, he considered that any place can become a place of prayer; thence his offer of the atrium where they were sitting. As Patriarch and host of the church of the Resurrection, he offered him the church itself! It is in the context of this reciprocal understanding of the prayer needs of each other that Euty chius reports on 'Umar's *akht-namē* to Sophronius.

Theophanes' record, removed from the culture and the mentality of the region, gives a different picture and impression about 'Umar, Sophronius, and their relationship. According to Theophanes, Sophronius was shocked at 'Umar's shabby appearance being dressed "in a filthy camel-hair garment"; so much so that he offered him his gown "until his own cloak was washed". 'Umar refused, but in the end complied. At the initial sight of 'Umar Sophronius, still according to Theophanes, exclaimed: "In truth, this is the abomination of the desolation established in the holy place, which Daniel the prophet spoke of".<sup>44</sup> However, Euty chius' account has prevailed. For example, Nectarios of Crete,

43 The Church of the Resurrection (widely known today as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) built by Ste Helena, the mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great.

44 Daniel 9:27; I Maccabees 1:54; 6:7; *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 339; Turtledove, 39.

Patriarch of Jerusalem (1660–69) and others have retained and repeated the Eutychius' version.<sup>45</sup> Other records make 'Umar entering the city as a pilgrim rather than as conqueror.

'Umar returned to the Jerusalem (644) to begin a program of public buildings, particularly mosques.<sup>46</sup> 'Umar's personality and piety are connected with a number of mosques attributed to him, or dedicated in his honour. They are called "Umariān" [*al-masajid al-'Umarīyya*]. The French archaeologist Clermont-Ganneau has suggested that these buildings were former Byzantine churches converted into mosques with the name of 'Umar attached to them as a tribute to him as a caliph.<sup>47</sup>

Different sources and their reading reflect different relations and attitudes between Jews and Christians. The Greek sources imply that Christians wanted Jerusalem to remain a Christian city as it had been up to that time; thence an explicit reference to the exclusion of Jews from it in the alleged covenant of 'Umar with Sophronius. On the other hand and in a curious way Goitein, although he seems to reject the "Jewish type" of record of the conquest of Jerusalem, he makes later such a type acceptable, and "the information that the Caliph ['Umar] was accompanied by Jewish sages ... plausible".<sup>48</sup> His rationale is that "As the Caliph entered the city that had been the Jewish holy place prior to its destruction by Rome, the enemy of the Arabs,<sup>49</sup> he would naturally seek the guidance of Jews",<sup>50</sup> notwithstanding Goitein's own assertion that "with the Arab conquest, a permanent Jewish population returned to Jerusalem *after an absence of five hundred years*".<sup>51</sup>

### 3 The Covenant between 'Umar and Sophronius, and the Jews

Once the treaty of capitulation was signed, 'Umar settled troops in the city; possibly those from al-Jābiya.<sup>52</sup> The document which 'Umar handed to Sophronius,

45 Nectarios of Crete (1602–1676), Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Ἐπιτομή τῆς Ἱεροκοσμικῆς Ἱστορίας* (Athens, [1677], 1980), pp. 282–3.

46 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 342; Turtledove, 42.

47 Cf. in *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (1897), p. 533; also in *Recueil d'Archéologie Orientale* (1898), p. 302; and *Quarterly Statements* (1901), p. 246. Cf. Phokylides, "Ἡ ὄπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας", *Nea Sion* 10 (1910) 268.

48 "Jerusalem in the Arab period", 171.

49 This is an obvious anachronism!

50 "Jerusalem in the Arab period", 172.

51 Cf. "Jerusalem in the Arab period", p. 169. Emphasis is ours.

52 Donner, *Conquests*, 247.

known as the *akht-namē*<sup>53</sup> is in itself an interesting phenomenon of inter-religious relations, and a challenge of immense proportions for its historical validation and interpretation. Two sets of sources seem to exist on the topic of ʿUmar's treaty with Sophronius; one set suggesting that ʿUmar negotiated on the urging of Syrian Jews – obviously to their own advantage – and the other suggesting that he negotiated with the Christians and specifically with Sophronius,<sup>54</sup> who delivered the city to ʿUmar, on the condition that no Jews would live in Jerusalem.<sup>55</sup> Most sources speak of the “people of Jerusalem”, presumably the Christians, entering into a treaty with the Muslims. In both instances Jews are presented as having been instrumental in the conquest of Jerusalem, and Arab Muslims as arbitrators and power brokers between Jews and Christians! The implication is that both, Jews and Christians, tried to take advantage of and use the conquests as a blessing in disguise and an opportunity for their own eventual vindication and redemption; the Christians from the Byzantine Romans, and the Jews from the Christian Eastern and Western Romans! Jewish reaction to the conquests was positive in the sense that the Arabs terminated the Roman rule in Palestine. A mid-eighth century Jewish apocalypse makes that evident. It is entitled “Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohay.”<sup>56</sup> Another Jewish apocalypse of the time of the conquest is the one known as “On that day.”<sup>57</sup>

What has been said up to this point is based on the assumption that a treaty was, indeed, signed and handed by ʿUmar to Sophronius. The question, however, is not that simple. There is something to be said on the variety of records which speak of a treaty, and the way in which one may choose to read them. The discussion of these records is part of understanding the time and the content of the *akht-namē*.

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53 Turkish word of Persian origin, meaning “deed”, or “covenant”. I owe this information to Professor Irfan Shahid of Georgetown University. On the *akht-namē* with a translation of the text from the Greek, refer to Chapter 10 in this volume.

54 Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 4; text, pp. 419–420; translation, p. 425.

55 For citation of these sources, see Donner, *Conquests*, p. 322, nn. 287, 288, 289.

56 For the Hebrew text, see A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, Leipzig 1855, vol. III, pp. 78–82. For a discussion and partial translation, see B. Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1950.

57 Hebrew text in L. Ginzberg, *Geniza Studies in memory of Doctor Solomon Schechter*, Vol. 1, New York 1928, pp. 310–312; discussion and translation in B. Lewis “On that day: A Jewish apocalyptic poem on the Arab Conquests”, in P. Salmon, ed. *Mélanges d'Islamologie*, Leiden, 1974. Cf. Crone-Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1977] 1980), pp. 5 and 153, n. 16.

Without repeating all such records, we will summarize Goitein's treatment of the subject. He identifies<sup>58</sup> four types of records:

- I. The earliest one which he considers the most reliable. In this type belongs al-Baladhūri's *Futūh*. According to al-Baladhūri, the city was handed over to Khalid b. Thabit al-Fahmi, the head of a not particularly outstanding unit, on the explicit condition that the hinterland would fall to the conqueror, while the city itself would not be harmed as long as the residents paid the imposed taxes.<sup>59</sup> Goitein states that in this account "No text of this treaty is mentioned, for none existed". On the basis of al-Baladhūri's silence the implication, for Goitein, is that the *akht-namē* is a forgery. But on the basis also of al-Baladhūri he makes 'Umar to be in Arabia at the time of the fall of Jerusalem, and to visit it for the first time shortly after, when he was with the main Arab army at al-Jābiya in Transjordan; something which most sources do not support.
- II. In the second type of record a "treaty" is mentioned but, according to Goitein, such a record is "general, brief, and does not really differ from al-Baladhuri". In this type Goitein mentions Al-Ya'qubi and Ibn al-Batriq. But if this record does not really differ from al-Baladhūri, which Goitein takes as the most reliable and it does mention a treaty, why then such a treaty is improbable?
- III. In the third type of record belong those accounts which add an item (not all of them, though), that "no Jew will live with them – i.e. the Christians – in Jerusalem". These are mostly Christian authors. This information can be found in only one Muslim source, the Iraqi Sayf, quoted by al-Tabari, Muthir al-Gharam, Ithaf al-Akhissa, and others. But Goitein hastens to say about Sayf that his "lack of reliability is well-known and whose irresponsibility and ignorance about Palestinian matters are illustrated by reports about the conquest of Ramla, a town founded by the Muslims only some seventy years later!" But why so many Muslim historians make Sayf their source and give reference to him, and why Al-Tabari is considered reliable when he refers to Sayf on Ramla and not on Jerusalem?
- IV. The fourth type of record, in the words of Goitein, "includes as part of the 'treaty' the later 'Covenant of 'Umar' whose purpose was to degrade those under his patronage. In these reports, for example, the Christians of Jerusalem undertook not to speak Arabic". The reference here is to Mujir ad-Din.

58 The four types are summarized in his "Jerusalem in the Arab period", p. 171. Cf. also a sketchy survey of references to Arab historiographers on the treaty of 'Umar by E. Michaelides, "Ἡ συνθήκη τοῦ 'Ομάρ", *Nea Sion* 21 (1926) 499–504.

59 *Futuh* (1932), 144.



There is, of course, another (the Jewish) kind of record that has entered Arab historiography, which we mentioned earlier, according to which 'Umar entered Jerusalem with the support and under the guidance of Jews who were knowledgeable of the city, even though they had been absent from it for five hundred years!

Even if one takes these four types of record as axiomatic, the Greek accounts belong to the second and partially to the third. The Muslim sources of the same types, which speak of a treaty containing a Christian condition that "no Jew will live with them". They are actually ascribing to Sophronius a request for 'Umar to do what Heraclius, according to Theophanes, had done before; that is, when in 629 Heraclius brought the cross back to Jerusalem he "expelled the Hebrews from the holy city, ordering that they should not be allowed to come within three miles of it".<sup>60</sup> The Muslim sources might have even confused this information on Heraclius with the treaty of 'Umar with Sophronius, *because no such clause is found in this akht-namē!*

The event, the content and the meaning of the *akht-namē* as well as the details surrounding the capitulation of Jerusalem, when looked upon with a more sober and unbiased eye, seem more congenial, contextual and historical to be rejected outright. Something general that can be said with some certainty is that, with the capitulation of Jerusalem to 'Umar by Sophronius, the Roman Emperor is replaced by the Muslim caliph, at least for the Christians, as guarantor and protector of the Christian sites! Very much can be extrapolated from this, regarding the indigenous Christian attitude towards Islam, towards Jerusalem, and towards intercommunal relations.

60 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 328; Turtledove, 30. There is a curious connection between religion and geography, in which there seems to be an identical coincidence of feeling among the *ahl al-Kitāb*. There is a *hadith* which justifies the expulsion of Jews and Christians from Arabia, belonging to the Muslims alone. Cf. al-Bukhāri, *al-Sahīh*, ed. L. Krehl (Leiden, 1864), 11, 294. Cf. Heribert Busse, "The Arab Conquest in Revelation and Politics", *Israel Oriental Studies*, 10 (1980) 14–20, at 18. To the Christians also, the holy sites had become Christian sites on account of their connection with the life of Jesus, in which the Jews had no longer rights, and the expulsion of the Jews by the Romans had forfeited their rights to Jerusalem *de facto*.

## The Covenant of ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattāb with the Christians of Jerusalem

Among the texts collected by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus in his *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachylogias*<sup>1</sup> there is one from the Patriarchal Codex 176 (pages 1–357) bearing the title: “By monk Procopios of Nazianzus, Aramboglou, dragouman of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, *Trampled Jerusalem*.”<sup>2</sup> The book is a history of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in five parts: a brief Preface by monk Anthimos from Aghialos (pp. 123–4); a First Part, “containing the list of those who have served as Patriarchs of Jerusalem, from James the *adelfotheos*<sup>3</sup> up to master Polycarp the serving celebrated Patriarch” [1808–1827] (pp. 124–132);<sup>4</sup> a Second Part, “containing what happened to us by the Franks regarding the most holy places and sites of pilgrimage” (pp. 132–154); a Third Part, “On matters regarding the Armenians (pp. 154–215); a Fourth Part, and the longest, “containing translations of the most necessary decrees regarding the sites of pilgrimage in Jerusalem which have been issued at different times for us by the Ottoman Sultans; first [of them being] the *akht-name*<sup>5</sup> of ‘Umar Khattāb<sup>6</sup> which was given by him to Patriarch Sophronius I at the time of the capitulation of Jerusalem in the year 638 of our Saviour, the fifteenth Ottoman year from the flight of Muhammad” (pp. 216–309); a fifth Part, “Appendix on what is happening lately in Jerusalem (written by monk Anthimos from Aghialos)” (pp. 309–332); and “An Addendum by monk Anthimos” (pp. 332–3).

Among the documents in the Fourth Part, of particular interest to us here is the first one, which claims to be a Greek translation of the *akht-name*<sup>7</sup> of

1 *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, Volume III, ([1897]; Bruxelles: Culture et Civilization, 1963), pp. 123–333.

2 Ἱεροσολίμ. Καταπατουμένη.

3 *Adelfotheos*, lit. “brother of him who is God” [i.e. of Christ].

4 This information provides us with the *terminus post quem* of the date of the book, that is, on or before 1827.

5 Transliterated in Greek as *akhdhinamēs*.

6 Transliterated in Greek as Omer Khattāp.

7 The word means “privileged edict”. Several and similar such edicts have survived in Greek sources, safeguarding the rights of the Christians to various holy places. A celebrated one is that which the monks of the monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai have been showing until today as the *akht-name* of the Prophet himself (!) by which Muhammad has reaffirmed the right of the monks to maintain their monastery, and exhorted the Muslims to respect his

ʿUmar, granted to Patriarch Sophronius I at the time of the capitulation of Jerusalem (638).<sup>8</sup> Calling the year of the Hijra “Ottoman year” should not come as a surprise to the reader, as the author, living during the Ottoman period, equates naturally “Muslim” with “Ottoman”, as in earlier centuries Byzantine writers called the Muslims “Saracens”, “Arabs”, “Persians”, “Achaemenids”, “Turks”, depending on with whom they were in contact. However, the date and the names mentioned in the title are historically accurate and in accordance with the record of the capitulation of Jerusalem.

Some sources suggest that ʿUmar negotiated with, or on the urging of, Syrian Jews, obviously to their own advantage. Other sources suggest that he negotiated with Christians and specifically with Patriarch Sophronius who delivered to him the city on the condition that Jews would not be allowed to live in Jerusalem. But such a clause is not found in the *akht-namē*. Most sources speak of “the people of Jerusalem”, presumably the Christians, making a treaty with the Muslims.<sup>9</sup> This text, therefore, is presumed to be *the* text of the agreement between ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb and Patriarch Sophronius. It has been valued as an extremely important document for the Christians of Jerusalem, safeguarding the ownership and guardianship of their holy places; thus, embedded throughout history into the tradition of the ecclesiastical historical literature.<sup>10</sup>

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wishes and never invade the monastery or disturb their lives. The genuineness of two of the most important edicts of privilege have, naturally, been disputed. These are the *akht-namē* of Muhammad the Prophet to the Monastery of Sinai, and the *berat* of Mohammed the Conqueror to Patriarch Gennadius II, Scholarius [1453–56, 1458–63]. N.J. Pantazopoulos, *Church and Law in the Balkan Peninsula during the Ottoman Rule* (Thessalonike: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976; rpt. Amsterdam, Adolf M. Hakkert, 1984), p. 20. One can notice significant similarities between this last *berat* and the privileges given to the Greek city of Yannena in 1430 by the father of Muhammad the Conqueror, Murad, through Sinan Pasha, *Ibid.*, p. 21, n. 50.

8 On Patriarch Sophronius I of Jerusalem (634–638/9) and the capitulation of Jerusalem, refer to Chapter 9 in this volume.

9 For the citing of sources, see Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N. Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981) p. 152, and n. 287 (p. 322).

10 On the versions of the treaty, see De Goeje, *Mémoires d'Histoire et de Géographie orientales*, no. 3, pp. 152–154. Papadopoulos-Kerameus (*Ανάλεκτα*, vol. III, p. 216, n.1) gives references to various writings containing the Arabic text and Greek translation of the testament; e.g. Beniamin Ioannides, *Προσκυνητάριον τῆς ἁγίας Γῆς. Ἡ ἅγια Πόλις Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ τὰ περίχωρα αὐτῆς* (“Guide of pilgrimage to the holy Land. The holy City Jerusalem and its surroundings”, Jerusalem, 1877), pp. 144–145; Constantius from Sinai, *Ἀπάντησις κατὰ τοῦ ζητήματος τοῦ κ. Εὐγενίου Βορέ περί τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Ἁγίων Τόπων* (“On the issue raised by Mr. Eugenius Bores regarding the holy sites in Jerusalem”, Constantinople, 1851), pp. 47–51; Constantius I, from Sinai, Patriarch of Constantinople of Byzantium [1830–1834], *Βιογραφία καὶ συγγραφαὶ αἱ ἐλάσσονες* (“Life and writings, the minor ones”, Constantinople, 1866), pp. 260–261; Gregory Palamas, *Ἱεροσολυμιάς, ἥτοι σύντομος ἱστορία*

Here is the text of the *akht-namē* in its entirety, in translation from the Greek:

In the name of God, the compassionate and merciful. ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb.

Praise be to God who has made us glorious through the reverence of Islam, honoured us with the faith, showed mercy upon us through his prophet Muhammad (upon whom may be God’s peace), led us [away] from the error, gathered us through him [his prophet] from being dispersed, united our hearts, gave us victories over our enemies, made us firm in the countries, and constituted us as brothers joined together by love. Therefore, worshippers of God, give thanks to God for this gift.

This is my letter, of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb. It has been given to the honourable and reverend Patriarch of the royal nation,<sup>11</sup> Sophronius at the Mount of Olives, in the place of holy Jerusalem. It is a treaty and a promise for the care of the subjects, priests, monks and nuns, wherever they may be and wherever they may want to establish themselves. They should enjoy our trust (because when a subject is mindful of all the duties of subordination, this one must enjoy the trust of us, faithful, and of those who will rule after us); and the causes which cause them to be disturbed should be eliminated from them, according to the subordination and obedience which they have shown. There should be trust upon them,<sup>12</sup> their churches, their monasteries and all the rest of the places which they own and which they venerate, those which are inside Jerusalem and those outside. These are the *Kakames* that is, the church of the Resurrection;<sup>13</sup> the great church of the Nativity of Jesus (peace be

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τῆς ἁγίας πόλεως Ἱερουσαλήμ (“Jerusalem account, that is a brief history of the holy city of Jerusalem”, Jerusalem 1864), pp. 392–394. Cf. also, Ioannes Phokylides, Ἡ ἱερὰ Λαύρα Σάββα τοῦ ἡγιασμένου (“The holy lavra of St. Sabas”, Alexandria, 1927), p. 280; and D.C. Dennett Jr., *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 62–4.

- 11 lit. “of a nation that has a king (sic); implying the Imperial Byzantine Empire.
- 12 The text uses the word *empistosēne* which in this context can also be translated as “they should be entrusted with ...”.
- 13 Procopius, the author of the book, remarks at this point that *Kakames* is how the Muslims call the church of the Holy Sepulchre “having corrupted the arabic word *kiyām* which means resurrection”; thence, the Arabic name of the church of the Resurrection, *al-Qiyama*. According to S. D. Goitein, the Muslims corrupted this name to *al-Qamama* ([church of] the Dung); a distortion which “was apparently a retaliatory act for the previous desecration of the Temple site”. “Jerusalem in the Arab period (638–1099)”, *The Jerusalem Cathedral* 2 (1982), p. 172. Goitein maintains that ‘Umar visited Jerusalem after its fall, accompanied perhaps by Jewish sages who (in spite of their absence from the city for five hundred years) knew the city and served as his guides. He proceeds then to say

upon him) in Bethlehem; the cave with the three doors, the eastern, northern and western. The rest of the Christian nations which are found there [in Jerusalem] that is, the Iberians<sup>14</sup> and the Champesians, and those who come [as pilgrims] to pray,<sup>15</sup> Franks,<sup>16</sup> Copts, Syrians, Armenians, Nestorians, Jacobites and Maronites, should be subject to and obey the said Patriarch. This [Patriarch] should be the first among them, because these [rights] have been bestowed by the precious and beloved Prophet, who was sent by God the Most High, have been honoured with the seal of his precious hand, and has commanded [us] to be favourable towards them and make them enjoy our protection. This way, we, the faithful, should be benevolent towards them for the sake and in honour of him who was benevolent towards them. They should be, therefore, exempt from the land tax [*haraj*] and the *kafar*,<sup>17</sup> and free from all ill-treatment and taxes, on both land and sea, and [free] to enter the *Kamames* and the rest of their places of worship, and not to pay anything. As to the rest of

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that the Christians had left the site of the Temple is desolation on purpose, in order to fulfil Jesus' prophesy that this site would remain desolate forever. 'Umar was shocked at the appearance of the site and ordered it to be cleared and become a Muslim prayer site. But, a) if the site had remained desolate and 'Umar was against the "Judaization" of Islam, as Goitein states (in *Ibid.*), why would he have wanted this particular and foremost Jewish spot to become a Muslim site of prayer? And b) if the contrast between the section of the city around the church of the Resurrection and the Temple (just a few yards away) was so great, why would the *Muslims* have called the church itself church of the Resurrection *al-Qamama* (the Dung) as "a retaliatory act ..."? It is interesting, however, that Procopius, the author of *Trampled Jerusalem*, says that *Kakames* is a *Muslim* distortion. The name must be a later interpolation in the text; otherwise it is not easy for anyone to imagine 'Umar b. al-Khattāb having corrupted an Arabic word. There is a brief report by D. Bahat on recent excavations in the vicinity of the Dung Gate, in *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* (Jerusalem: Archaeological Newsletter of the Israel Antiquities Authority) 4 (1985) 54.

- 14 If the name "Iberians" makes the date of the *akht-namē* suspect, one should keep in mind that in Greek the name was used with various meanings. It could refer to Spain or to Georgia in the Caucasus. Cf. Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, *De administrando imperio*, 23. Georgian Iberia is to be distinguished from the theme of Iberia, the north-eastern most theme of the Byzantine Empire, created by Basil II (976–1025). The various peoples of the Caucasus were often confused. Thus, John Tzetzes (ca. 1100–ca. 1180/5) a Georgian himself, calls the Iberians, Alchasiens, and Alans one people. Cf. "Iberians", in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, eds. Alexander P. Kazhdan et al., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 971.
- 15 Lit. to pay their respects, or to prostrate.
- 16 The reference to the Franks makes the date of the edict suspect, unless it is a later interpolation in order to bring the document up to date.
- 17 Is this the head tax paid by non-Muslims (*kafir*)?

the Christians who come to the *Kakames* for a pilgrimage, each one of them should pay to the Patriarch one and a half dram of silver.

Every faithful, therefore, man or woman, must keep what we have commanded in this [agreement], either this is a king, or judge, or ruler with authority on earth, rich or poor among the faithful, men or women.

This present order of ours was handed over to them [the Christians], in the presence of the congregation of the honourable friends, ‘Abd Allāh, ‘Uthmān<sup>18</sup> b. Affān, Sa‘id b. Zaid, ‘Abdu l-Raḥmān b. Auf and the rest of the brothers and honourable friends.<sup>19</sup> Let everyone, therefore, take notice of what is written in our writing, and act accordingly, leaving it again to the hands of those [of the subsequent generations?].

May God, then, give blessing and peace to our master Muḥammad and his family;<sup>20</sup> and thanksgiving may be offered to God the Lord of the worlds.<sup>21</sup> God is for us powerful and most excellent guardian.

It was written on the twentieth of the month Rabī‘ al-awwal,<sup>22</sup> the fifteenth (year) of the Prophet’s flight.

After having read this, should anyone violate this command, he will be [considered] a transgressor of the covenant of God, and an enemy of His beloved Apostle, from now till the day of judgement.

This was an extremely positive and powerful document in the hands of Sophronius and, through him, of the Christians of Jerusalem. It released them from the obligation of paying taxes, gave them absolute ownership of the holy sites in Jerusalem and its environs, as well as full protection for their lives. In addition, the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem was given primacy and authority over all other Christians, residents or visitors of Jerusalem. Nowhere in this

18 The name is given in the Turkish pronunciation, Osman.

19 An advance on Jerusalem took place during the second phase of the conquests by ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās who led his troops to Ajnadayn. The battle of Ajnadayn, the first major battle between the Muslim and the Byzantine troops, took place on the 27th or 28th of Jumāda I, A.H. 13/29 or 30 July, AD 634. Donner, *Conquests*, p. 129. But the real siege of Jerusalem was conducted later by Abū ‘Ubayda, in which Yazid b. Abū Sufyān, Mu‘īdh b. Habal, Khālid b. al-Walīd, ‘Amr b. al-Ās and other commanders participated.

20 Lit. “his party”.

21 The phrase reminds us of the first verse of the *Fatihah*.

22 Is this the third month, Rabī‘, of the Muslim calendar? It is spelled here in Greek as Repioullebbel. If Donner’s (*Conquests*, p. xx) chronological table is correct, and the first day of Rabī‘ I of the year A.H. 15 was 13 April 636, it means that the twentieth of Rabī‘ I was 3 May 638. The introductory statement of the *akht-namē*, which most likely is not part of the edict itself but of Procopius, speaks of “the *fifteenth* Ottoman year from the flight of Muhammad”, which points to 637.

edict are Jews mentioned. Did all these privileges imply that 'Umar trusted the Christians the most to retain the sanctity and unviability of the holy places, because they formed the most populous and congenial community in the city?

Certainly, the covenant is extremely generous towards the Christians and, for this reason, perhaps, has become suspect. Goitein dismisses it as a fabricated text of interreligious feud, based on al-Ṭabarī whose source is most unreliable and contains the stipulation "that no Jew should live with them" [the Christians] in Jerusalem"; and also on the grounds that it contains unrecognizable and fictitious names as witnesses.<sup>23</sup>

The case might be that the *akht-namē* has a historical core and became the basis for similar agreements between the Muslim lords of Jerusalem and its Christian community. The case may also be that as it worked well for the Christians of Jerusalem, this *akht-namē* provided the pattern of similar agreements, such as the one of the monastery of Sinai, which is purported to be an even earlier and more authoritative one, bearing the name of the Prophet himself!

23 Cf. his "al-Ḳuds" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. vol. 5, pp. 322–339. The sources are divided on whether 'Umar came to Jerusalem and signed a treaty at the urging of Syrian Jews, or of the Christians who wanted the Jews out of the city. On the sources on this matter, see Donner, *Conquests*, p. 322, n. 287. Most Muslim sources, with the exception of al-Ṭabarī, and all the Christian ones support, to some extent, the latter case. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, p. 339; Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 4, pp. 419–420 (text), 2, p. 425 (transl.).

## Anastasius of Sinai (c. 640–c. 700) and “Anastasii Sinaitae” on Islam

Social scientists of Islam<sup>1</sup> as well as students of the history of Byzantium and Byzantine society<sup>2</sup> have, rightfully, pointed to the neglect of sources which can provide us with a glimpse of life in Byzantine and Muslim societies at its grass roots and in their day-to-day interaction.

The concern of scholars in this general direction seems to grow, as the ambitious work *A History of private life*<sup>3</sup> indicates. For our purpose, it is interesting to note that Baynes and Chadwick were drawn to their conclusion as they were studying the *Pratum Spirituale* (“Spiritual Meadow”, or *Leimon*) of John Moschus (c. 550–619), edited likely by his monastic companion Sophronius the Sophist (560–638), the later celebrated Patriarch of Jerusalem. The *Leimon* is an anthology of stories, sayings and anecdotes which these spiritual brothers gathered from visits to monasteries, lavras and hermitages throughout Palestine, Egypt and Sinai. Historians have neglected such sources, possibly for being unintelligible, sermonic, spiritual in character and belonging to the realm of reverie. However, there is much of everyday life, grass-root ethos and historical value that one can redeem from them.

The narrative material which we will consider here hastily<sup>4</sup> belongs to that family of writings which, along with the *Historia Lausiaca* (419/20) by Palladius, the *Geronticon* or *Apophthegmata Patrum* (end of the fifth century) and the

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- 1 Cf. Richard W. Bulliet, “Process and Status in Conversion and Continuity” in *Conversion and Continuity. Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*. ed. by Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), p. 8.
  - 2 Cf., e.g. Norman Baynes, “The ‘Pratum Spirituale’”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 13 (1947), 404–414; H. Chadwick, “John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974), 41–74; Alexander Khazdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), Introduction.
  - 3 Phillipe Aries and Georges Duby, general editors. Vol. 1, *From pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Veyne; vol. 2, *Revelations of the Medieval world*, ed. Georges Duby, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977–).
  - 4 A detailed study of Anastasius Sinaites and of two at least other “Anastasii”, who are approximately his contemporaries, on Islam, is still missing. A study on “Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims” by Sidney H. Griffith, in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987), 341–58 has shown how much substance there is on this subject.



*Leimon* of Moschus, form a body of spiritual literature which, for its delightful and instructive style, lives of saints, miraculous acts, and especially deeds and words of wisdom by spiritual masters of the Christian East, has enjoyed a tremendous popularity in East and West. Some of these stories have been frequently repeated, edited and interpolated into other collections;<sup>5</sup> a sign of popularity, but also a formidable obstacle in determining conclusively their author. The narratives which we will consider have been edited and grouped by Nau into two groups, entitled *Διηγήσεις διάφοροι* (= Various narratives),<sup>6</sup> and *Διηγήματα ψυχοφελή* (= Narratives profitable to the soul).<sup>7</sup> Both these collections bear the name of “Anastasius humble monk” as their author. The assumption then had been that these are the work of Anastasius of Sinai (c. 640–c. 700), the defender of the Chalcedonian cause, author of such well-known writings as *Ὁδηγός* (= Guide)<sup>8</sup> and *Ἐρωτήσεις καὶ Ἀποκρίσεις* (= Questions and Answers).<sup>9</sup>

Krumbacher had earlier detected the possible confusion that the name Anastasius can cause and had warned that material found in the manuscript tradition under the name of Sinaitic monks with this name needs first to be studied carefully before the literary property of each Anastasius is determined.<sup>10</sup> The work of sorting out the various Anastasii has been done, with some success, by Stergios Sakkos in his doctoral dissertation *Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναιτῶν*.<sup>11</sup>

Nau, the editor of the present narrations, distinguishes two Anastasii, one as the author of narratives Nos. XLII–LI and LIV–LVI whom he identifies with the author of the *Ὁδηγός*<sup>12</sup> (a theory which Sakkos rejects<sup>13</sup>), and another possibly

5 E.g. No. LVII is also found in Moschus' *Leimon* as No. 192, PG 87:3072A–C; an obviously later interpolation into this earlier corpus. No. XLIV also was included by John of Damascus in his florilegium of quotations and stories related to icons. P. Bonifatius Kotter, ed. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* vol. 3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), p. 184.

6 F. Nau, “Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints purs du Sinai”, *Oriens Christianus* 2(1902)58–89; narrations I–XL, hereafter cited as Nau (1902).

7 F. Nau, “Le texte grec des récits utiles à l'âme d'Anastase (le Sinaïte)”, *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903), 56–88; narratives XLII–LIV, subsequently cited as Nau (1903).

8 PG 89:36–309. Critical edition, Karl-Heinz Uthemann, *Anastasii Sinaitae Viae Dux* (Leuven: Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, No. 8; 1981).

9 PG 89:311–824.

10 Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, vol. 1 (rpr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), p. 60.

11 Thessalonike, 1964.

12 Nau (1902)60, and (1903)58. A reconstruction of a profile of Anastasius, author of narratives XLII–LI and LIV–LVI, on the basis of internal evidence from these narratives, in Nau (1903) 57–58.

13 According to Sakkos this Anastasius is an eighth-century (possibly later but not contemporary as he claims) compiler (not even the author) of earlier stories of strong eucharistic emphasis, which he put together for apologetic purposes; *op. cit.*, pp. 177–8.

earlier Anastasius, as the author of narratives I–XL; stories which Sakkos identifies with the “*Vitae* of holy Fathers” attributed to Anastasius I, Patriarch of Antioch (561–571).<sup>14</sup> Thus in the material under consideration we might have either two or three different authors, under the name of Anastasius.

Notwithstanding the complexities which the identification of the various Anastasii presents, their material offers us a sketchy, albeit insightful, glimpse into the Sinai of the early seventh century, and particularly into the relations between Sinaitic monks and Saracen tribesmen, pagan Christianized and, subsequently, Muslims. Of particular interest for our topic are, in descending order, narratives I–XL and the *Ὁδηγός*, and to a much lesser extent narratives Nos. XLII–LIX. There is rich information about the physical environment, socio-political structures and life in Sinai inferred to or directly related in the narratives, which should become the subject of a separate study.

That the narratives make the Sinai peninsula the abode of monks and ascetics, goes without saying since the narratives deal primarily with Sinaitic monastic life and experiences, and since their Anastasii authors are all assumed to be Sinaitic fathers. The peninsula was inhabited also by what the narratives call “Saracens” and what the *Hodegos* calls (when it refers to Muslims) “Arabs”. There seems to be a constant, organic interdependence and interaction between the two communities. Saracens and monks were fully aware of each other. Many Saracens knew of and paid visits to even remote habitats of hermits,<sup>15</sup> who, in turn, provided them with food and extended to them hospitality.<sup>16</sup> Socially, monks seemed to exercise an authority over the Saracens. Some Saracens were living with ascetics, possibly as their *ὑποτακτικοί* (= servants).<sup>17</sup> These were treated as, and even called, “brothers”.<sup>18</sup> Whether these particular servants were Christianized Saracens is not made clear. There were also Saracen Christians, living in Sinai.<sup>19</sup> Some hermits did not welcome Saracens to their cells as visitors because these were not Christians; and this was known and respected among the Saracens.<sup>20</sup> There are also instances in the stories in which the name or the presence of a Saracen inspired fear in the mind of an ascetic.<sup>21</sup>

14 *Op. cit.*, p. 179. Thus Sakkos infers three Anastasii, while Nau infers to two! Griffith places this Anastasios to a generation earlier than the author of the *Ὁδηγός*. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 354, n. 39.

15 xxv, Nau (1902), 75.

16 x, Nau (1902), 66; xxiv, Nau (1902), 74–75.

17 xii, Nau (1902), 67.

18 xix, Nau (1902), 71.

19 Nau (1902), Appendice.

20 xxv, Nau (1902), 75.

21 xxii, Nau (1902), 74.

Saracens were living as nomads attending to their flocks of goats.<sup>22</sup> Marriage among them was taking place at a very early age, and the male was the key figure in the family. There is no mention of polygamy, certainly not among Christianized Saracens. The husband was the guarantor and the protector of the faith of the members of the family.<sup>23</sup> Saracens were living in habitats of their own called *mazif*,<sup>24</sup> sharing the meagre resources of the peninsula with the Christian hermits. Narration xxiv allows us to speculate that this story was initially told with Saracen-Christian relations in mind and for didactic purposes; that non-Christian Saracens and Christian monks should strive to co-exist and share the resources of the land, avoiding any annoying, plundering or harming the one (meaning the Saracen) the other (i.e. the Christian) lest, by God’s intervention, the culprit would be excluded therefrom! ... While some narrations imply that ascetics had Saracens as servants, Narration xxvi makes a Christian, by the name George Draam, to be “a servant of a Saracen” who was attending his master’s camels in the desert of Belem. The mention of a surname points to a layman; possibly to a Christianized Saracen, rather than to a monk. If this is the case, and if such a case is typical, one may want to suggest that Christianized Saracens were among those of the lowest classes of tribesmen at the service of Christian monks.

In the narrations one also finds Saracens on the holy summit of the mountain of Moses, serving perhaps as guards or guides. As non-Christians, they did not share in the devotion of the Christians and they were unwilling to accept miracles as Christian interpreted certain events or occurrences. Saracens and Jews are grouped together in the stories as people who do not believe in miracles and who ridicule “the God of the Christians”, [meaning Christ] and their most reverent symbol, the cross.<sup>25</sup> As a later codex<sup>26</sup> of this particular narrative does not contain this part of the story, it is possible to assume that its last paragraph is a later addition aiming at Muslims and Jews, and reflecting a later development in Muslim-Christian relations.

The Saracens dealt with in the first forty narratives seem to be pagans rather than Muslims. Islam and Muslims are explicitly mentioned for the first time in a story from an eleventh-century codex,<sup>27</sup> which Nau has included as an Appendix to, or a kind of (chronological?) conclusion of, the first collection of narratives. The story relates to the conquest of Sinai and to the treatment

22 xxiv, Nau (1902), 74–75.

23 Nau (1902), 88.

24 Nau (1902), 74.

25 Nau (1902), 82.

26 Dionysiou, Athos, No. 132, 16th century.

27 *Codex graecus*, No. 1596, f. 413. This is the longest and most different of all, coming perhaps from a different hand.

of the Christianized Saracens by the Muslim Arabs. With the Muslim invasion Christianized Saracens apostatized to Islam en masse. One of them decided to flee and retain his faith. But he was prevented by his wife who pleaded passionately with him to kill her and their children so as not to fall into the hands of the Muslims. The Christian Saracen slaughtered his wife and children and fled his home to live as a hermit. The thrust of the story is not on consenting to one's slaughtering his wife and children, but on exalting his willingness to sacrifice himself and his family for the purity of one's faith. The Muslim invasion of Sinai, according to the story, did not aim so much at conquering more desert land, as at bringing tribesmen back to the Arab fold, and to the Arab monotheism.<sup>28</sup> The story makes no mention at this point of conversion of Christians, forceful or not. This particular story seems to suggest that Saracens were living in greater numbers in the oasis of Pharan and in the traditional place of the burning bush where the Monastery of St. Catherine is located.<sup>29</sup> Obviously these must have been mostly Christianized Saracens, serving and depending upon Sinaitic monks who were concentrated in these areas. They were Arabic speaking,<sup>30</sup> unlike the majority of the Sinaitic monks who, presumably, were Greek speaking – a picture not much different in any of these respects from present day life in that part of Sinai.

The Muslims reached also the holy summit.<sup>31</sup> To the monks this act constituted “pollution” and “defilement” of the sacred place.<sup>32</sup> That the Muslims would have wanted to reach the holy summit should not have been at all surprising. Given the favourable Qur'anic attitude toward Christian priests and monks<sup>33</sup> and the respectful treatment of holy places of Christianity,<sup>34</sup> it is unlikely that the early Muslim conquerors of Sinai were involved in some kind

28 Nau (1902), 87.

29 *Ibid.* Nau (1902), 87.

30 Nau (1902), 88.

31 It is not clear from this story whether the holy summit is that which is called today Jebel Mūsa, above St. Catherine's monastery, or whether the mountain of Moses is, actually, Jebel Serbal in the oasis of Pharan, as others have argued. Cf. Kurt Weitzmann, “The History” in John Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1980), pp. 11–12. The fact that the monastery-fortress of Justinian (built between 548 and 565) was already in place at the time of the Arab invasion, points to Jebel Mūsa as the one believed to be the mountain of the commandments.

32 Narration 11, Nau (1902), 61. This story must have been narrated or written in the early part of the Islamic era as its wording “before [the holy summit] was polluted or completely defiled by the *present* nation”, implies.

33 Surah *Al-Mā'idah* (5:82).

34 Cf. Eutychius, Monophysite Patriarch of Alexandria's (933–940/1) description of the capitulation of Jerusalem and 'Umar's respect for the Christian holy places. *Chronography*, Latin tr. PG 111:907–1156.

of act of desecration of the place of worship at the summit of Jebel Mūsa. It was, certainly, the ignorance of the Christian Sinaitic residents about Islam that justified their sense of pollution of Sinai. The Muslim Arabs are referred to in one instance as a “nation”<sup>35</sup> or, according to a later codex of the same narration, as “nations”<sup>36</sup> – possibly with the meaning of “pagans”,<sup>37</sup> and in another instance, in the context of the conquest of Syria/Palestine, they are termed as “barbarians”.<sup>38</sup>

If the first group of stories is relatively affluent in information, depicting generally an irenic co-existence between Sinaitic monks and Saracens, the second group is very scant, indeed. There is only one story involving Saracens, and this is taking place not at Sinai but at the village of Karsatas “four points away from Damascus”.<sup>39</sup> In this story,<sup>40</sup> Saracen men, women and children occupy and defile a Christian church. A Saracen directs his arrow against an icon of St. Theodore, which then bleeds. In the end, all twenty-four Saracens meet a bitter death. The iconophile texture of the story betrays its later date and different, more confrontational, Muslim-Christian relations.

The scarcity of reference to Saracens in Sinai and yet the explicit references to Muslims in the *’Οδηγός* may make the attribution of authorship of this second group of narrations to Anastasius Sinaites (as Nau has done) suspect. Against the background which the first forty stories paint, which presumably was common knowledge and the property of most Sinaitic monks, it is hard for anyone to imagine that a prolific writer like the author of the *’Οδηγός* would have no material on the Saracens of Sinai to record. Anastasius Sinaites never mentions either “Muslims” or “Islam”. He deals not with Saracen tribesmen but with Arabs, whom he groups together with the pagans, and whom he probably considers as pagans.<sup>41</sup> Under the influence of the conquests he refers to them as “the Amalek of the desert, who rose to smite us, the people of Christ”.<sup>42</sup> This statement is in line with contemporary attitudes and reactions to the Arab invasions by Christians of all doctrinal affiliation (Chalcedonians,

35 II, Nau (1902), 61.

36 Sakkos, *op. cit.*, 182.

37 It is not improbable that the Sinaitic monks viewed the earliest Muslims as “pagans”. Cf. Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai”, p. 347.

38 IX, Nau (1902), 65.

39 XLIV, Nau (1903), 64–5, at 64.

40 XLIV, Nau (1903), 64–5.

41 On Question 126 where he deals with the question on whether Satan fell for not bowing down to man [Adam], his response is that “Such as these are the myths of the Greeks [i.e. pagans] and the Arabs”. PG 89:776B–C. Cf. Griffith reads this as “pagan Arabs”. “Anastasios of Sinai”, 346–7.

42 PG 89:1156C.

Monophysites, Nestorians), that the conquests constituted a punishment of God for the unfaithfulness and heresy of the Christians – an accusation for which each group made responsible the others.<sup>43</sup> Being primarily interested in the defence of the Chalcedonian doctrine from the recent challenge of Monothelism, Anastasius was not concerned with Islam. Only in the *Ὁδηγός* he makes indirect references to Islam on the following three points:<sup>44</sup> First, he condemns the claim of the Arabs that the Christians believe in two gods, or that God has given birth to a son in a physical sense.<sup>45</sup> This claim is the fundamental Muslim misunderstanding of the Trinitarian and the Christological doctrine of which Anastasius appears to be aware at a very early stage. Whether his awareness was based on his own knowledge of the Qurʾān or on the popular Muslim belief and declarations cannot be established. Second, he groups Arabs, Jews, pagans [Greeks] and Manicheans together and accuses them of not accepting the Scriptures in their entirety, but selectively.<sup>46</sup> It is his contention that if they did, they would also accept the New Testament and they would believe in Christ. By inference Anastasius seems to reject here the Muslim doctrine of the *tahrif* and, by extension, that of the purity and superiority of the Qurʾān as the final word of God's revelation. This point shows that by the time of the *Ὁδηγός* (643–686/89, and probably before 681) the Muslim polemic argument of the *tahrif* was in circulation. Third, he groups Arabs and Severians together and accuses them for not understanding the meaning of the words “nature” and “bearing” [giving birth], taking instead these words in a human and carnal sense.<sup>47</sup> The objection here is obviously directed at Surat *al-Tawhid*, the succinct statement of the theology of Islam. Finally, Anastasius' *Διάλεξις κατὰ Ἰουδαίων* (= Discourse against the Jews)<sup>48</sup> contains a criticism against the Jews for claiming unique ancestry from Abraham, and a reminder that “Ishmael, too, was Abraham's son, and a first-born one”. “Or you think”, Anastasius continues,

43 Cf. Question 16, P 89:476–7. For a discussion of the earliest Christian reaction to the Arab conquests, see Alexander A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, 2 vols. (Brussels, 1935, 1959); Walter E. Kaegi Jr., “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest”, *Church History*, 38(1969)139–49; John Moorhead, “The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions”, *Byzantion* 51 (1981), 579–91; D.J. Constantelos, “The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek Sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries”, *Byzantion* 42 (1972), 325–57; S.P. Brock “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam”, in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed. *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale-Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 9–21, notes, 199–203.

44 For a full discussion of these topics, see Griffith's article “Anastasios of Sinai”.

45 PG 89:41A; Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. ccxviii.

46 PG 89:120C; Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. 113.

47 PG 89:169; Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, 169–70.

48 PG 89:1204–1272.

“that because of Sarah, Isaac should be preferred to Ishmael and to the sons of Abraham who were born of Chetura?”<sup>49</sup> Was Anastasius echoing Muslim arguments, or was he offering support and ammunition to the Arabs in order to make themselves an argument in favour of their ancestry? In either case, the Muslims find a formidable ally in Anastasius on this issue.

Anastasius Sinaites lacks the sophistication and the comprehensiveness of John of Damascus on matters regarding Islam.<sup>50</sup> But, after all, he does not appear to have had the same kind of direct and official exposure to Islam as John of Damascus had, nor does he seem to be a man of the same understanding and far-reaching foresight of the implications of the new Muslim-Arab reality for Byzantine Christianity and culture, as the Damascene demonstrated that he was, some fifty years later. Of much greater importance in the comparison of these two figures is the consideration of how fast Islamic doctrine and practice became known, and possibly the norm, in Syria/Palestine (and to a lesser extent perhaps in Sinai), and how much more the Eastern Christians became aware of and responsive to the Muslim reality in a short period of time.

49 PG 89:1256B–C.

50 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas *John of Damascus on Islam. The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972).

## “Saracens” and the Syrians in the Byzantine Anti-islamic Literature and Before

The etymological analysis of the name *Σαρακηνοί* (*Saraceni*), its meaning and changes are matters which have frequently been discussed, especially by Irfan Shahīd in his extensive works on the Arabs before Islam.<sup>1</sup> These are important issues because of the historical and *cultural overtones* they carry for the name,<sup>2</sup> especially when some of them have been applied wholesale to the Arabs; something which Arabs seem to resent. A widely accepted notion is that the name “Saracens” is derived from the Arabic *sharq* (“east”) and the adjective *sharqīyyūn* and thus connotes the land and the people (the “easterners”) east of Palestine, and possibly Arabia and the Arabians.<sup>3</sup> The appellation “easterners” is not an uncommon but rather a transhistorical designation of peoples, depending on where those who call them so live. It is found in the Old

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- 1 *Rome and the Arabs: a prolegomenon to the study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington D.C. 1984) especially pp. 123–141; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fourth century* (Washington, D.C. 1984); *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fifth century* (Washington, D.C. 1989); and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C. 1994). The topic continues to attract the attention of scholars. See, *Présence arabe dans le Croissant fertile avant l'Hégire. Actes de la Table ronde internationale (Paris. 13 Novembre 1993). Texts réunis* par Hélène Lozachmeur (Paris, 1995), especially the studies by F. Israel, “L’onomastique arabe dans les inscriptions de Syrie et de Palestine”, pp. 47–58; and M.C.A. Macdonald, “Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes, l’inscription de Rawwāfa et l’armée romaine”, pp. 93–102. For further remarks on the Arabs in the Byzantine literature, see Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature”. *The 17th International Byzantine Congress. Major Papers* (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1986), pp. 305–323.
- 2 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, xxv; emphasis is ours.
- 3 J.H. Mordtmann rejects the derivation of the name “Saracens” either from *saraka* (“to rob”), or from *shark* (“east”), or even from *sharik* suggested by Sprenger. See, “Saracens” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leyden, 1934), 155–56, at 156. According to him the sources point to the Sinai Peninsula as the original home of the Saracens; something which Ptolemy’s evidence, if we can say that we understand it correctly, seems to support. See below, note 15. In the middle of the third century they came to the front of smaller tribes, which they incorporated, and as such they disturbed the Roman frontier. In striking contrast to secular and ecclesiastical writers, the Arabs themselves do not know the name “Saracen”, either for a small tribe or as a collective name for the North-Arabian tribes. Procopius reports that Sinai was called Arabia and in his times “third Palestine”. *On the Buildings*, v 8, 1; ed. Otto Veh, *Prokop Bauten* (München, 1977), p. 274.



Testament.<sup>4</sup> Since the Byzantines used the Septuagint version, the rendering particularly of Genesis 29:1 and Ezekiel 25:4 are important at this moment for our discussion. Genesis 29:1 states that, “Καὶ ἐξάρσας Ἰακώβ τοὺς πόδας ἐπορεύθη εἰς γῆν ἀνατολῶν, πρὸς Λάβαν τὸν υἱὸν Βαθουήλ τοῦ Σύρου, ἀδελφὸν δὲ Ῥεβέκκας, μητρὸς Ἰακώβ καὶ Ἡσαὺ” (“And Jacob started and went to the land of the east, to Laban, the son of Bathuel the Syrian, and the brother of Rebecca, mother of Jacob and Esau”). Interestingly enough the Revised Standard Version omits the second part of the passage, stating simply that, “Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east”. The O’ rendering, however, with the specification of Bathuel as Syrian (“τοῦ Σύρου”) suggests clearly that “the land of the east” (“γῆ ἀνατολῶν”) applies to, or at least includes, Syria! Also the O’ version of Ezekiel 25:4 seems to be making the “easterners” a proper name, calling them “υἱοὺς Κεδέμ”: “διὰ τοῦτο ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ παραδίδωμι ὑμᾶς τοῖς υἱοῖς Κεδέμ εἰς κληρονομίαν ...” (“I will deliver you to the children of Kedem for an inheritance ...”). The Revised Standard Version has rendered “τοῖς υἱοῖς Κεδέμ” as “people of the East”. Whether we are allowed, in combination of Genesis 29:1 and Ezekiel 25:4, to understand Syria and Κεδέμ (or “people of the East”) as synonyms and interchangeable, is for experts to determine.

However, even with those, like Hitti, who explain and identify the “Saracens” with “easterners”, the name “has a history of its own before the rise of Islam, and can be applied to others, besides Arabians and Arabs”.<sup>5</sup> The Byzantine anti-Islamic literature seems to support the assertion of “others”, besides Arabians and Arabs, at least as far as the pre-Islamic and the early period of Islam is concerned. In the course of time, however, the names “Saracens” and “Arabs” merged, became fused and confused, and in the end were rendered irrelevant in relationship to any specific geographical, social, or political designation.

More often than not the name “Saracens” was associated not with an ethnic, but with some social and cultural meaning. A mistranslation of a Thamudic inscription found in northern Hijāz has contributed to the image of the Arabs at the end of the Roman period as nomads; and this because Roman historians normally did not refer to people by their ethnic (e.g. *Arabs*) but

4 Genesis 29:1, Numbers 23:7, Isaiah 11:14, Ezekiel 25:4, Job 1:3.

5 Cf. Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs. From the Earliest Times to the Present* (New York, 1973), p. 43; emphasis is ours. Localities with names such as *as-Sarqāt*, *Sārqi l’Asi*, *as-Sarqīya*, and *as-Sarqiyūn*, are found in abundance in the ancient Near East. Cf. *Tübingener Atlas des Vorderen Orients*, eds. Horst Kopp and Wolfgang Rölling, Subject Index, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1994), p. 1449. The sultanate of Asia Minor took the name *Rūm* as a former Roman (i.e. Byzantine) province. At the same time it was called *Anatolū*, from Greek Ἀνατολή (East), and its people *Anatolites*, or people of the East; an appellation which included Turks, Greeks, Armenians and others. Cf. Alexis Savvides, *Oi Τούρκοι καὶ τὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens, 1996), p. 51.

by some social designation, for example *Saraceni*, with the meaning of “tent dwellers”, or *scenitae*.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Shahīd makes a pointed distinction between *Arabs* and *Saracens*, the one as an ethnic, and the other as a social and cultural designation.<sup>7</sup> In this respect he points, and rightly so, to Palmyra and Emesa as major urban Arab centres of activity and commerce, as well as to the contribution which the Idumaeans and the Nabataeans made to the Graeco-Roman civilization.<sup>8</sup> Shahīd suggests that the name *Saraceni* was attached in the fourth century to the Arabs, whose true identity and common name was “Hagarenes” and “Ishmaelites” that is, the uncovenanted people.<sup>9</sup> Graeco-Roman writers on the one hand and the Biblical authors of Genesis and of the Gospels on the other (a strange grouping, indeed!), represent for him two groups of authors who present two images of the Arabs. The former project them as *latrones*, raiders of the Roman *limes*, nomads, tent-dwellers (*scenitae*), “barbarian Saracens addicted to unattractive social and religious practices such as human sacrifice”,<sup>10</sup> while the latter project them as the descendants of Hagar, the uncovenanted Ishmaelites, rather than the legitimate sons of Sarrah! However, although credited with the etymology of “Saracens” from the name of Sarrah, the two images of the Saracens, that of the Graeco-Roman<sup>11</sup> and of the Biblical authors, had been fused even before Eusebius (*ca.* 260–*ca.* 339).

As there is, obviously, no unanimity on the complex and possibly emotional subject of the origin and meaning of the name “Saracens”, we intend here to only touch upon its usage, implications and reasons in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, and that only selectively.<sup>12</sup> Because if, indeed, during the Byzantine period the name “*Saracens*” became a substitute for “Arabs”,<sup>13</sup> (although there

6 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, p. 6.

7 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, 108.

8 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, 153.

9 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, 106.

10 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, p. 108.

11 To them Josephus should be included. Shahīd, *Rome*, 108.

12 What we call “Byzantine anti-Islamic literature” is not something defined and codified; we do not mean, however, every and any kind of literature which refers to Islam or to Muslims in *passim*, but rather a corpus (still not fully identified) which treats Islam as a topic of its own, usually for apologetic, or polemic purposes. Of the several general surveys on this literature, we mention selectively Wolfgang Eichner, “Die Nachrichten über den Islam bei den Byzantinern”, *Der Islam* 23 (1936) 133–162, 197–244; Georges C. Anawati, “Islam et christianisme: Le rencontre de deux cultures en Occident au moyen Âge”, *Mélanges Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire* 20 (1991), 233–299. Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam. I. Textes et auteurs* (VII–XII s.), (Louvain, 1969); *idem*, *Polémique Byzantine contre Islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Leiden, 1972); *idem*, *Apologétique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Altenberge, 1982).

13 Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, p. 31.

are exceptions to it because many authors speak directly of *Arabs*), then we would suggest, that the reason for the almost exclusive employment of the name was intentional and had to do with the way in which Byzantine anti-Islamic polemicists understood Islam and how they perceived the Muslims. Because of the many names and epithets which they used to refer to Muslims, like Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, Persians, Achaemenids, Arabs, “the new Amalek”, infidels, barbarians etc.<sup>14</sup> the one which they used the most was *Saracens*. Thus Byzantine anti-Islamic polemicists dealt primarily with *Saracens* than with Arabs, because the name seemed to carry conveniently a comprehensive and loaded meaning. Particularly polemicists from the eastern provinces of the empire (and we need to note here that the earliest ones were from the Syro-Palestinian region) seemed to be using the name with an even greater awareness of its meaning and implications, than other Byzantines. To understand the source and the cause of their sensitivity and sentiment towards the *Saracens*, we may need to go back briefly to the history and traditions related to Saracens and Syrians.

Ptolemy (fl. Alexandria ca. 130–75 AD) refers to *Saracenē* as a place in Arabia Petraia and to *Saracens* as people in Arabia Felix, but differentiates them from what he calls with the proper name *Scenitae* (literally, “tent dwellers”), the Nabataeans and the Thamūd.<sup>15</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, a native of Antioch (latter half of the fourth century), identified them with the tent dweller (*scenitae*) Arabs.<sup>16</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 or 340) gives a rather lengthy and revealing description of the Arabs as Saracens.<sup>17</sup> In commenting

14 Name calling of Muslims in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature is a theme of its own which has been the topic of my research during my tenure as Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks in 1996, and still in progress.

15 “Διατείνει δὲ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τὰ καλούμενα Μέλανα ὄρη ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ Φαράν μυχοῦ ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν. Καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν δύσεως τῶν ὀρέων τούτων παρὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ... ἢ τε Σαρακηνὴ παρήκει ... καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτὴν ... ἢ Μουσυχιάτις, ὑφ’ ἣν πρὸς τῷ κόλπῳ εἰσὶν ... οἱ Φαρανῖται, παρὰ δὲ τὴν ὀρεινὴν τῆς Εὐδαίμονος Ἀραβίας ... οἱ Πραΐθηνοί”. *Geographia*, ed. C.F.A. Nobbe, vol. II [Leipzig, (1887) 1966], *lib. v, cap. 17, 3*, pp. 68–69. “Κατέχουσι δὲ τὴν μεσόγειαν παρὰ μὲν τὰς ὀρεινάς τὰς πρὸς ἄρκτους ὡς ἐπίπαν ... Σκηνῖται, καὶ ἔτι ὑπὲρ αὐτούς ... Θαδῖται, μεσημβρινώτεροι δὲ τούτων ... Σαρακηνοί, καὶ ... Θαμυδηνοί ...” *lib. VI, cap. 7, 21*, p. 102. Even before Justinian and during the fourth century the name “Saracens” was widely used for the Nabataeans residing in Sinai and S. Palestine, and for the Bedouin tribes which had migrated from the Sassanian Empire to Transjordan, the Judean desert, and Arabia. Cf. Ze’er Rubin, “Christianity in Byzantine Palestine”, *Jerusalem Cathedra* 3 (1983), 102–3.

16 “... *et Scenitas praetenditur Arabas, quos Saracenos nunc appellamus*”. *Rerum gestarum*, ed. Wolfgang Seyfarth, vol. I (Leipzig, 1978), Bk. XXII, ch. 15, 2.

17 “Οὕτω δηλουμένων, ὡς οἶμαι, τῶν παρ’ ἡμῖν καλουμένων Σαρακηνῶν, οἳ, τὰς πραγματείας ποιούμενοι, καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτῆς Βαβυλῶνος τὸ παλαιὸν ἐσκηνοποιοῦντο. Φευκτὸς δὲ οὕτω καὶ τοῖς ὁμόροις, καὶ τοῖς ἐξ ἔθνους μακροῦ περινοστοῦσιν αὐτὴν, ὡς μὴδὲ ποιμένας τοὺς ἐξ Ἀράβων κατανεμησάσι

on Isaiah 13:20 (“Οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθωσιν εἰς αὐτὴν διὰ πολλῶν γενεῶν, οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ διέλθωσιν αὐτὴν Ἄραβες, οὐδὲ ποιμένες οὐ μὴ ἀναπαύσονται ἐν αὐτῇ”), Eusebius, like Marcellinus, states that the Saracens “are called Saracens by us” (“τῶν παρ’ ἡμῶν καλουμένων Σαρακηνῶν”). Eusebius’ testimony suggests that “Σαρακηνοί” was not an indigenous name but an appellation invented or used for the Arabs, or (oriental) nomads.<sup>18</sup> As merchants they had travelled all the way to the East into the innermost desert as far as Babylon where they lived in tents. Eusebius describes also the Saracens as “tribal nations” (“τὰ Σαρακηνῶν ἔθνη”) whom not only the neighbours but also those who came from far-away lands avoided, either out fear or because of their culture. He remarks that Isaiah called them “Arabs” because of their proximity to Arabia;<sup>19</sup> thence the connection between Arabs and Saracens!

The ecclesiastical historian Sozomenos (first half of the 5th c.)<sup>20</sup> who was from Bethelia near Gaza, speaks extensively of the Saracens.<sup>21</sup> He states explicitly that their original name was “Ishmaelites” (nothing unusual for people and tribesmen to be called by their father or mother’s name) but they assumed the name *Saracens* with the meaning of “descendants of Sarrah” to reverse the negative connotations which the names “Ishmaelites” or “Hagarenes” carried (because of the humble origin of their mother Hagar, the slave concubine of Abraham) and thus alleviate the stigma of their own illegitimacy.<sup>22</sup> Obviously,

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τι τῶν ἰδίων θρεμμάτων ἐν αὐτῇ, διὰ τοι τὸ ἡρημῶσθαι παντελῶς. Ἰστέον δέ, ὅτι τὰ Σαρακηνῶν ἔθνη, καὶ μέχρι αὐτῆς διήκοντα τῆς Ἀσσυρίων καὶ τὴν ἐσωτάτω νεμόμενα ἔρημον, Ἄραβας ὀνομάζει· γείτονα γὰρ ἔχουσι τὴν Ἀράβων χώραν”. PG 24189BC.

- 18 From 671 BC the Assyrian Empire consisted of two parts, the Northern (Assyria) and the Southern, which included the *Aribi* (Arabs?)! See, *Hammond Atlas of the Bible Lands* (Maplewood, N.J., 1990), map on p. 16.
- 19 Up to the sixth century the Saracens are identified with the Persians, or with those under their hegemony. Arabs themselves never used the name “Saracen” in their own literature. Translations of Greek *Lives* into Arabic substitute the term “Arab” with “Σαρακηνός” (*Sarakēnos*), or “Persian”. Sometimes other terms appear instead of ‘Arab’. Thus in the Arabic Life of Symeon the Stylite, *Sarakēnos* has been translated as “Persian”. *Codex Sinaiticus Arabicus* 406, p. 37. V. Christides, “The names Ἄραβες, Σαρακηνοί etc. and their false Byzantine etymologies”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65 (1972) 329–333, at 331. Even the rhetorician Libanius (314–393) who was born, educated, lived and died in Antioch, did not use the names *Arab* and *Saracenos* (if he knew them), but he favoured rather the name Ταϊνός. Shahīd, *Fourth Century*, 127. Is this, perhaps, evidence that Libanius did not know the name *Saracen* or, if he did, he refused to connect it with the *Arabs*?
- 20 His *Ecclesiastical History* is a continuation of the Eusebius’ one for the years 324–439. *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by J. Bidez and G.C. Hansen (Berlin, 1960).
- 21 *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία*, VI, 38; ed. Bidez, *Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 297–300.
- 22 “Τοῦτ’ ἄρα τὸ φύλον ἀπὸ Ἰσμαὴλ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ παιδὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβὼν καὶ τὴν προσηγορίαν εἶχε, καὶ Ἰσμαηλίτας αὐτοὺς οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἀπὸ τοῦ προπάτορος ὀνόμαζον. ἀποτριβόμενοι δὲ τοῦ νόθου τὸν ἔλεγχον, καὶ τῆς Ἄγαρ τῆς Ἰσμαὴλ μητρὸς τὴν δυσγένειαν (δοῦλη γὰρ ἦν) Σαρακηνοὺς σφάς

the Saracens whom Sozomenos describes are the Saracens of eastern Syria (and even Christianized ones),<sup>23</sup> defending themselves from Jews and Christians, rather those of Arabia proper; because why would the latter make such a conscientious claim of being descendants of Sarrah and at the same time remain polytheists? The Arab consciousness of descent from Sarrah, although long in Arabian lore, had faded away and deteriorated into paganism long before the rise of Islam, as the account of Ibn al-Kalbī’s (d. 763) *Kitāb al-Asnām* (“The Book of Idols”) testifies. From Sozomenos’ account, who presents the Saracens also as unreliable allies<sup>24</sup> who break treaties easily, it becomes clear that the Saracens had every reason to want to claim a direct descentance from Sarrah.

Attempts to ameliorate a name and reputation show that there was some general ill perception about the Saracens, their descent and conduct. There are instances in which the name “Saracens” implied ruthlessness, being evil, and even possessed by the devil. For example, Deacon James, the purported fifth-century writer of the *Life of Saint Pelagia the Harlot*<sup>25</sup> relates the following episode.

After Pelagia was baptized and was administered communion by the monk-bishop (of Edessa?),<sup>26</sup> Nonnos, while we were eating some food, we suddenly heard sounds as of a man suffering violence and the devil cried out, saying, “alas, alas, what I am suffering from this decrepit old man? It was not enough for you to snatch from me three thousand Saracens and baptize them, and obtain them for your God.”<sup>27</sup>

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ὠνόμασαν ὡς ἀπὸ Σάρρας τῆς Ἀβραὰμ γαμετῆς καταγομένουσ”. *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία*, VI, 38, 10; ed. Bidez, *Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 299.

23 The conversion of the Saracens to Christianity took place during the reign of the Arian Emperor Oualens (364–378). About the Christianization of the Saracens (4th c.) we hear from Sozomenos (cf. *Kirchengeschichte*, VI 38; ed. Bidez, pp. 297–301) which Theophanes repeats in summary (*Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 64). Their ruler Al Mundir (“Alamundaros”) became a Christian and, as Theophanes remarks, “by God’s providence he was baptized by the Orthodox, that is, those who accept the Council [of Chalcedon]” (“Θεοῦ δὲ προνοίᾳ ὑπὸ τῶν ὀρθοδόξων ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐβαπτίσθη τῶν δεχομένων τὴν σύνοδον” [of Chalcedon?]) *Chronographia*, 159, 22–23. Theophanes’ remark implies a fierce competition among Arians, Nestorians, Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians to win the Saracens to their side.

24 Cf. *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία*, VI, 38, 1; VII, 1, 1. ed. Bidez, *Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 297, 302.

25 Translated into Latin by Eustochius, PL 73:663–72; also in ASS, Oct. IV, 261–6 (BHL 6605). *Pélagie la Pénitente*, ed. P. Petitmengin, 2 vols (Paris, 1981–84). English translation by Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (London, 1936), pp. 267–81; and Benedicta Ward, *Harlot of the Desert. A Study of repentance in early monastic sources* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1987), pp. 57–75.

26 the Syrian connection of this source is important!

27 ch. IX; Ward, *Harlot of the Desert*, pp. 71–2.

Although the statement aims at exalting Pelagia's virtues and value, the comparison between her and "three thousand Saracens" is not a very subtle inference to the perceived value of the latter! The *vita*, translated into many languages including Syriac, Arabic, Armenian and Georgian,<sup>28</sup> became a popular reading; something which did not help to improve the reputation of the Saracens among these people.

The name was associated with another experience, from the political and the military field. During the reign of Theodosius II (408–450), allied with the Persians and under the command of general Narses, tens of thousands of Saracens were sent against the Byzantines.<sup>29</sup> Only a few years later, during the reign of Zeno (474–475), Saracens devastated Mesopotamia which was under Byzantine control.<sup>30</sup> In the beginning of the sixth century Saracens launched *again* an expedition against Pheonecia, Syria and Palestine.<sup>31</sup> These were destructive expeditions aiming not so much at conquering and possessing new lands as at plundering villages.<sup>32</sup> In spite of their Christianization, the Saracens appeared to be unreliable allies to and unsafe neighbours for the Byzantines, waving between them and the Persians. Thus, Justin I (518–527) assigned his general Hypatius to guard the eastern flank of the Empire "because of the Persians and the expeditions of the Saracens";<sup>33</sup> neither al-Mundir himself was trusted, in spite of his Orthodox baptism.<sup>34</sup> According to *The Martyrion of St. Arethas and his fellow martyrs* (martyred ca. 520), an effort was made by the Persians to corrupt al-Mundir with money in order to start a war against the (Byzantine) Christians.<sup>35</sup>

28 See, "Pelagia the harlot" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 1618.

29 "... σὺν δυνάμει Περσικῇ, καὶ πολλὰς μυριάδας Σαρακηνῶν πρὸς βοήθειαν ἔχων". Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Carolus de Boor [(Lipsiae) Hildesheim, 1963], p. 85, 31–32.

30 "χαλεπῶς δὲ ὁ Ζήνων μεταχειρησάμενος τὴν ἀρχήν, ἐν προοιμίῳ Μεσοποταμίαν μὲν Σαρακηνοί, Θράκην δὲ κατέδραμον Οὐννοί ..." *Chronographia*, de Boor, 120:10.

31 "Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει [Anno Mundi 5994] γέγονε πάλιν Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιδρομὴ ἐν τε Φοινίκῃ καὶ Συρίᾳ καὶ Παλαιστίνῃ, μετὰ τὴν Ὠγάρου τελευταίην Βαδραχάρμου ..." *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 143, 21–22.

32 "Τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει ἐπεστράτευσαν Σαρακηνοὶ κατὰ Συρίας καὶ λυμηνάμενοι ἱκανὰ χωρία ὑπέστρεψαν". *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300, 16–17.

33 "καὶ προεβάλετο τὸν πατρίκιον Ὑπάτιον ... φυλάξει τὰ ἀνατολικά μέρη διὰ τοὺς Πέρσας καὶ τὰς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιδρομάς". *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 170, 30–171, 2.

34 cf above, note 23.

35 "Τὰ αὐτὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ Ἀλαμουνδάρῳ τῷ ἐξηγουμένῳ τῶν ὑπὸ Πέρσαις Σαρακηνῶν ἀπέστειλεν (?) ὑπισχοόμενος καὶ χρήματα δώσειν, εἰ κατὰ τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα Χριστιανῶν διωγμὸν κινήσοι". Symeon Metaphrastes, "Μαρτύριον τοῦ ἁγίου μεγαλομάρτυρος Ἀρέθᾳ", PG 115:1249–1289, at 1277D. On this persecution and martyrdom, see Irfan Shahīd, *The martyrs of Najran. New Documents* (Brussels, 1971), and *Idem*, "Byzantium in South Arabia", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 33 (1979) 23–94. The martyrdom caused a political upheaval in the Christian

In the early years of Justinian’s reign (527–565) the Saracens launched an expedition against Antioch, Palestine and Syria, which forced the emperor to defend the villages against “the barbarian Saracen”.<sup>36</sup> Further south in Sinai they posed such a threat against the monks and the Christian population that, on the testimony of Procopius, the emperor at their request built a strong fortification around their church dedicated to the Theotokos.<sup>37</sup> The monks needed the defence of the emperor against the Saracens, more than the defence of the Theotokos! The *Leimon*<sup>38</sup> of the Cilician born monk and writer John Moschus (d. in Rome 634) makes the Saracens living near the Dead Sea, dressed like Jews and often undistinguishable from them,<sup>39</sup> and as a particularly violent people.

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- Orient and the military intervention of the Christian Ethiopians in South Arabia; events which are alluded to in the enigmatic *surat al-Fil* (105, “The Elephant”).
- 36 “... ἐπέρριψεν Ἀλαμούνδαρος ὁ Ζεκαϊκῆς, ὁ βασιλίσκος τῶν Σαρακηνῶν, καὶ ἐπραΐδευσε τὴν πρῶτην Συρίαν ἕως τῶν ὀρίων Ἀντιοχείας ... καὶ ἐφόνευσε πολλοὺς καὶ ἔκαυσε τὰ ἔξω Χαλκηδόνος καὶ τὸ Σέρμιον κτήμα καὶ τὴν Κυνηγίαν χώραν”. *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 178, 8–12. One can detect Theophanes’ despise for the Saracens and for al-Mundir in particular in his belittling him as “ὁ βασιλίσκος τῶν Σαρακηνῶν” (“the little [or, fake] king of the Saracens”).
- 37 “ἐς δὲ τοῦ ὄρους τὸν πρόποδα καὶ φρούριον ἐχυρώτατον [ὄχυρώτατον?] ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος ὠκοδομήσατο, ὡς μὴ ἐνθένδε Σαρακηνοὶ βάρβαροι ἔχοιεν ἄτε τῆς χώρας ἐρήμου οὔσης ... ἐσβάλλειν ὡς λαθραϊότατα ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ Παλαιστίνης χωρία. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τῆδε πεποίηται”. Procopius, *On the Buildings*, v 9, 9; ed. Veh, *Prokop Bauten*, p. 276. For Procopius the Saracens are adversarial (“... Σαρακηνοὶς τοῖς πολεμίους”, II 6, 15 and II 11, 10), invaders (“ὄσον τοὺς ἐκείνη [Σεργιούπολιν] Σαρακηνοὺς ἀποκρούεσθαι οἷον τε εἶναι ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς αὐτὸ ἐξέλειν”, II 9, 3 and II 11, 12) and, by inference, living as nomads rather than as city dwellers, unable to storm walled cities (“ἀδύνατοι γὰρ τεichoμαχεῖν εἰσι Σαρακηνοὶ φύσει”, II 9, 4). The last reference to the Saracens being inexperienced in storming walled cities is repeated, almost verbatim, in George Acropolites’ (1217–1282) “Oration On St. Barbaros” [ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, (Bruxelles, [1891] 1963), vol. 1, 405–20]: “ταύτη μετὰ πολλῆς ὅτι παρασκευῆς μετὰ πολλοῦ τοῦ θράσους προσβάλλουσι, τὶ μὲν εἰς τεichoμαχίαν οὐκ ἐπαγόμενοι, τὶ δ’ οὐ μετὰ τὸ προσβαλεῖν ἐφευρόντες” (p. 408, 21–23).
- 38 *Pratum Spirituale*, PG 87:3, 2852A–3112B. French translation by M.-J. Rouët de Journel, *Le Pré Spirituel* (Paris, 1946, 2nd ed. 1960); Italian translation by R. Maisano, *Il Prato* (Naples, 1982); John Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschus* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992). For a detailed study of the MS editions and translations of the *Leimon*, see Henry Chadwick “John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist” in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982, # xviii. See also N.H. Baynes, “The ‘Pratum spirituale’”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 13 (1974), 404–14. Th. Nissen has published additional stories not found in Migne’s edition. “Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1938), 351–376.
- 39 A Council at the Lateran equated Saracens and Jews, at least in the dress: “Περὶ φίγξεως σχήματος Χριστιανῶν, Ἰουδαίων καὶ Σαρακηνῶν. Ἐν τισιν ἐπαρχίαις παρὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἢ Σαρακηνοὺς ἢ τῶν ἐνδυμάτων διαστέλλει διαφορά. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔν τισιν οὕτως τις ἐπηύξησεν σύγχυσις, ὡς μηδεμίαν διαφορὰν διαιρήσεται ...” PG 87: 2868C.

The name seems to imply the other. In one instance Saracens attack an anchorite and behead him.<sup>40</sup>

Theophanes speaks of the Saracens extensively, and not in a particularly complimentary way. Caught in war between the Persians and the Byzantines, Saracens were divided in their alliance. Ghassanid Saracens during Heraclius' reign (610–641) returned to Syria, pillaging its villages and scheming against the emperor.<sup>41</sup> Lahmite Saracens on the other hand, under Heraclius' command, carried also expeditions against the Persians.<sup>42</sup> What transpires abundantly from such narratives is the Saracen attraction for the goods of the villages on the eastern Mediterranean coast, of Syria, Phoenecia and Palestine and the experience by the local population of the Saracens as pillagers, and under this light that one must look for the Syrian experience of and sentiment towards them.

What Theophanes has to say of his own about the Saracens is only with reference to Muhammad, the “leader and pseudoprophet of the Saracens”; and this particularly unfavourable. He traces Muhammad's ancestry to Ishmael and from him to the Medianite bedouins.<sup>43</sup> Vaguely, therefore, and only by inference, does Theophanes reside on the name *Saracen* and attribute it to Sarrah. In fact this is the last time that he makes mention of the name. From the point of the rise of Islam and onwards Theophanes speaks of *Arabs*. Where this iconophile chronographer uses the name *Saracen* is only as a compound adjective, “Saracen-minded” (*σαρακηνόφρων*),<sup>44</sup> which he applies to his arch-rival iconoclasts, emperor Leo III “fighting against God” (“τοῦ θεομάχου Λέοντος”) and his adviser Basir, “the denier of God” (“τὸν ἀρνησίθεον καὶ τῆς ἴσης ἀλογίας ἐφάμιλλον”).<sup>45</sup> For Theophanes, these two are like the former Saracens and, now, like the Muslims – in doctrine and practice.

40 *Leimon, Cap. xx*, PG 87.3:2868 AB.

41 “Τῷ δὲ αὐτῷ ἔτει ἐπεστράτευσαν Σαρακηνοὶ κατὰ Συρίαν καὶ λυμηνάμενοι ἱκανὰ χωρία ὑπέστρεψαν”; and “τῶν δὲ Σαρακηνῶν τότε ὑποτάκτων ὄντων τῶν Περσῶν πλήθος ἱππέων λάθρα ἐπιπεσῶν τῷ βασιλεῖ διενεοίτο”, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 300, 17–18 and 304, 14–15.

42 “ἄρμησε κατ’ αὐτοῦ [Χοσρόη] καὶ προπέμφσας τινὰς τῶν ὑπ’ αὐτὸν Σαρακηνοὺς προτρέχειν, συναντῶσι τῇ τοῦ Χοσρόου βίβλα, καὶ τούτων τοὺς μὲν ἀνέλιον, τοὺς δὲ πεδήσαντες σὺν τῷ στρατηγῷ αὐτῶν τῷ βασιλεῖ προσήνεγκαν”. *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 307, 25–28.

43 “Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει ἀπεβίω Μουάμεδ, ὁ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἀρχηγὸς καὶ ψευδοπροφήτης ... οὗτος <ἐκ> μίας γενικωτάτης φυλῆς κατήγετο ἐξ Ἰσμαήλ, υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ. Νίζαρος γάρ, ὁ τοῦ Ἰσμαήλ ἀπόγονος, πατὴρ πάντων ἀναγορεύεται. οὗτος γεννᾷ υἱοὺς δύο, Μούδαρον καὶ Ῥαβίαν, Μούδαρος γεννᾷ Κούρασον καὶ Κάϊσον καὶ Θεμίμην καὶ Ἄσαδον καὶ ἄλλους ἀγνώστους. οὗτοι πάντες ᾤκουν τὴν Μαδιανίτιν ἔρημον καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐκτηνοτρόφουν ἐν σκηναῖς κατοικοῦντες. εἰσι δὲ καὶ ἐνδότεροι τούτων μὴ ὄντες τῆς φυλῆς αὐτῶν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ Ἰεκτάν, οἱ λεγόμενοι Ἀμανίται, τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν Ὀμηρίται. ἐπραγματεύοντο δὲ τινες αὐτῶν ἐν ταῖς καμήλοις αὐτῶν”. *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 333, 1–2, 14–22.

44 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 405, 14; 414, 27.

45 *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, 404, 29–405 4.



The Saracen reputation among the Byzantines, on the military level, seems to be improving somewhat with Emperor Leo VI the Wise (r. 886–912). In his *Tactica*<sup>46</sup> Leo devotes a considerable amount of space to the Saracens as one of the various “pagan camps” (“ἐθνικῶν παρατάξεων”) and the one which – given the fact that from the ancient times but more recently under Islam they are occupying Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt and other territories held before by the Roman and the Persian empires – is now bothering the Roman state.<sup>47</sup> They are “barbarians”,<sup>48</sup> who “pay attention to (lit. oil, or grease) the flesh and dishonour the soul”,<sup>49</sup> but throughout this section of the *Tactica* they are given significant credit for their military aptitude and techniques. Neither when they are pursuing nor when they are pursued do they brake their discipline and desert the army,<sup>50</sup> and of all the barbarous nations they are the best advised and most prudent in their military operations.<sup>51</sup> Leo’s conclusion is a praise to the Saracens, certainly “a barbarian and infidel nation”, for their devotion to their nation; a devotion which takes precedence over one’s individual opinion and interest, and to which rich and poor, men and women contribute in kind, and share the pains of war.<sup>52</sup> Similarly Photius, reporting on Nonnosos’ *History*, remarks that the author deals with a mission of ambassadors sent by Justinian to Ethiopians, Ameritas and *Saracens* which were the most powerful nations at the time.<sup>53</sup>

It is against this rather uncomplimentary background that one has to look for and understand the meaning and the use of the name *Saracen* by the Byzantine anti-Islamic writers. Thus, in introducing Islam as “the deceptive religion of the Ishmaelites”, John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)<sup>54</sup> begins with an interesting etymological explanation of the name *Saracens*. He makes it a composite of Sarrah and of the adjective “empty” (*kenoi*, κενοί, pl. of κενός), from Hagar’s complain to the angel “Sarrah has expelled me empty [of

46 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, ed. R. Vari, 2 vols (Budapestini, 1918–22). This edition contains only *constitutiones* I–XIII. Leo makes reference to the Saracens in *const.* XVIII, # 109–128, PG 107: 972B–976D. This whole piece is an interesting segment of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature.

47 “... τοῦ νῦν ἐνοχλοῦντος τῆ Ῥωμαϊκῆ ἡμῶν πολιτεία ἔθνους τῶν Σαρακηνῶν”. *Const.* 109, PG 107:972B.

48 “... ῥαδίως σὺν Θεῷ τὴν κατὰ τῶν βαρβάρων Σαρακηνῶν ἀναδήσονται νίκην”.

49 “... τὴν σάρκα λιπαίνοντες καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀτιμάζοντες”. *Const.* 111, PG 107: 972C.

50 “Οὔτε δὲ διώκοντες, οὔτε διωκόμενοι λύουσι τὴν τάξιν αὐτῶν”. *Const.* 116, PG 107:973B.

51 “Χρῶνται δὲ εὐβουλίᾳ καὶ καταστάσει πρὸς τὰς πολεμικὰς μεθόδους τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἔθνῶν δοκιμώτερον ...” *Const.* 123, PG 107: 976A.

52 Cf. *Const.* 128, PG 107: 976D.

53 “τὰ ἰσχυρότερα τῶν τότε ἔθνῶν”. *Photii Bibliotheca*, ed. I. Bekker, vol. I (Berlin, 1824) # 3, p.2.

54 Ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Vol. IV. *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica* (Berlin, 1981), p. 60, 1–2.

grace?]"<sup>55</sup> Name calling is not a novel feature in polemic and apologetic literature, and John of Damascus is a particularly skilful master in this regard. To the Muslim accusation that the Christians are “Associators” (Ἐταιριασταί) on account of the doctrine of the Trinity which, as they say, makes the Word and the Spirit “parts of God”, John of Damascus responds in kind by inventing the exact opposite equivalent calling the Muslims “Mutilators” (Κόπτας) on account of their dynamic monarchianism which, as he says, “mutilates” God from his Word and Spirit.<sup>56</sup> Thus in John of Damascus the name *Saracens* is apologetic and intentional, aiming at pre-empting any attempt on the part of the Muslims to claim legitimacy from Abraham, and it connotes *a priori* an uncovenanted people! Sozomenos may have provided the hint for this interpretation, but John of Damascus as master of words and name-calling, refurbished and applied it appropriately. He is making, however, an important distinction between *Ishmaelites* and *Hagarenes* on the one hand, and *Saracens* on the other: *Saracens* is the proper name by which the Arabs are commonly known, while *Hagarenes* and *Ishmaelites* are later appellations.<sup>57</sup> Thus the Muslims are first and foremost *Ishmaelites*, by extension *Hagarenes*, and only by appellation *Saracens*.<sup>58</sup> The dialogues also with Muslims attributed to John of Damascus are the one with “a *Saracen*”<sup>59</sup> and the other with an intellectual who in the end is proven irrational.<sup>60</sup> However, even though he uses for them mainly the name *Saracens* and for Islam “the heresy of the Ishmaelites”, John of Damascus leaves no doubt in his reader’s mind that he is referring not to people who live east of Palestine, but in Arabia and to a religion which arose on Arabian soil.<sup>61</sup>

55 “... διὰ τὸ εἰρήσθαι ὑπὸ τῆς Ἄγαρ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ· Σάρρα κενὴν με ἀπέλυσεν”. Kotter, IV, p. 60, 5–6.

56 “Οὐκοῦν φεύγοντες ἔταιριάζειν τὸν θεὸν ἐκκόψατε αὐτόν ... Ὡστε ὑμεῖς μὲν ἡμᾶς ψευδηγοροῦντες ἔταιριαστὰς καλεῖτε· ἡμεῖς δὲ κόπτας ὑμᾶς προσαγορεύομεν τοῦ θεοῦ”. Kotter, IV, 63, 73–4; 64, 76–7.

57 “... διόπερ Ἀγαρηνοὶ καὶ Ἰσμαηλίται προσαγορεύονται. Σαρακηνοὺς δὲ αὐτοὺς καλοῦσιν ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς Σάρρας κενούς ...”. Kotter, IV, 60, 4–5.

58 This distinction between “καλοῦσιν” and “προσαγορεύονται” reinforces Eusebius’ and Sozomenos’ suggestion that the earliest name for the nomads of the East was *Haragarens*, or *Ismaelites*, replaced by the name *Saracens* for apologetic purposes. Cf. above.

59 PG 94:1585A–1596A; and Abū Qurra’s *διὰ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ* PG 94:1596B–97C.

60 PG 96:1336B–1348B, Kotter, IV, 427–438.

61 John of Damascus’ accuracy of description of Islam is remarkable. On this, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972); *Idem*, “The Arab character of the Christian disputation with Islam. The case of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)”. In *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 185–205; *Idem*, “John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited”, *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984–1985), 104–118.

Those *opuscula* of Abū Qurra, bishop of Haran, which deal with Islam and refer to Muslims are also against *Saracens*,<sup>62</sup> although they do refer also to Hagarenes.<sup>63</sup> Abū Qurra carries a dialogue with an “Arab”,<sup>64</sup> a “Hagarene”,<sup>65</sup> and an “infidel”.<sup>66</sup> The names do not appear in the text. We are not certain, therefore, whether these appellations are Abū Qurra’s, or some editor’s interventions. Another piece, however, indicates that the dialogue was prompted by “the hypocrite Saracens” who “when they meet a Christian do not greet him but say to him directly, ‘Christian, confess that there is only one God without a partner, Muhammad is his servant and apostle’”.<sup>67</sup> The dialogue then is carried between Abū Qurra and a “Barbarian”, as if this were a proper name. Again, we do not know whether this is Abū Qurra’s or some editor’s appellation. In the mind of the editor at least, the names *Saracen* and *Barbarian* are interchangeable.<sup>68</sup> Muhammad is the pseudo-prophet of the *Hagarenes*,<sup>69</sup> although the dialogue in *opusculum* XXI is between the bishop and a *Saracen*, and in this case with a “thoughtful one”;<sup>70</sup> so are the dialogues in *opuscula* XXII, XXIII, and XXXVIII.<sup>71</sup> Again, Abū Qurra seems to be using the name *Saracen* as a convenient appellation, with the pejorative meaning and connotation of an infidel, irrational and barbarian, rather than with the meaning which the Syro-Palestinian populace ascribed to it during the pre-Islamic period.

Unlike the two previous authors, a major writing under the name of the enigmatic monk Bartholomeus of Edessa (probably from Palestine, 9th c.?) is, in the way in which its editor has at least entitled it, a *Confutatio Agareni* (“Ἐλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ”); a blistering refutation of Islam and an attack on Muhammad.<sup>72</sup> The text itself, however, is “Against the Saracens who are called

62 97:1544A and *Opus.* XXII, 97:1552–1553; *Opus.* XXIII; *Opuscula* XXI–XXV, 97:1548–1561.

63 *Opus.* IX PG 97:1529; *opus.* XX, 97:1545C.

64 PG 97:1528.

65 PG 97:1529.

66 PG 97:1492–1504; 1541–1544.

67 *Opusc.* XIX, PG 97:1544.

68 Cf. *opuscula* XXXV (97:1588–1592), XXXV (97:1592–93), and XXXVII (97:1593).

69 *Opusc.* XX, 97: 1545C.

70 PG 97:1548–1552, “Τῶν ἐλλογίμων Σαρακηνοῶν τις ...”.

71 PG 97:1552–53; 1553–1561; 1593–96.

72 The clearly *akephalon* text, in a later and not very accurate edition, is in PG 104: 1384–1448. A more accurate version, with a German translation, in Klaus-Peter Todt, *Bartholomaios von Edessa. Confutatio Agareni. Kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe* (Würzburg, 1988). Another writing, entitled *Κατὰ Μωάμεδ* (*Contra Muhammed*), attributed to the same author and printed immediately after the Confutation (PG 104: 1448–57), does not seem to have come from the same hand.

Ishmaelites, deriving their origin from Hagar ...”<sup>73</sup> Definitely Bartholomeus, like John of Damascus’ description of Islam, refers to Arabia and the author deals with the Arabs of Arabia proper. He makes frequent references to the pre-Islamic Arabian religion,<sup>74</sup> he refutes an Arabian Islam, and he refers to Arabic toponyms and Arabic names which, as an Arabic-speaking, transliterates with a remarkable accuracy. Another writing under his name, *Against Muhammad*, begins with the same connection between “the Saracens who are called *Ishmaelites* ... and *Hagarenes* ...; an almost verbatim introduction like that of John of Damascus.

In his “*Historical Sermon*” Gregory Decapolites,<sup>75</sup> in speaking of *Saracens*, he is referring to the Umayyad Muslims in Syria. The story is about a Saracen prince who attempted to convert the church of St. George into a stable but later, during the preparation of the gifts for the liturgy by the priest, he experienced a Eucharistic vision: he saw Christ as an infant being slain and mutilated by the celebrant priest. Amazed at what was happening and angry at the priest, he waited for the liturgy to finish when he confronted the priest with his actions. The priest, realizing that this was a divine intervention, instructed him as to the mysteries of Christianity and baptized him. When the prince attempted to convert the Emir, who was his uncle, and he refused to renounce his Christian faith, he was put to death. Gregory calls and praises the martyr as “former Saracen”, thus distinguishing him from a born Christian. Clearly, therefore, the name *Saracen* here takes the place of a *Muslim*.

Nicetas of Byzantium refutes the Qur’ān, the book “of Muhammad, the Arab”.<sup>76</sup> He consistently treats the Qur’ān as an *Arab* product, or “reverie”,<sup>77</sup> and he sounds completely unaware of and disinterested in the meaning and implications of the name *Sareceni* itself. He does deal, however, with and

73 “Κατὰ Σαρακηνῶν οἱ καλοῦνται Ἰσμαηλίται μὲν ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰσμαήλ καταγόμενοι ...”. The text continues with the known explanation of the names, reminiscent of that of John of Damascus: “... Υἱὸς δὲ οὗτος ἦν τοῦ Ἀβραάμ, γεννηθεὶς ἐξ Ἄγαρ τῆς παιδίσκης Σάρρας. Ἄγαρῆνοι δὲ ἀπὸ Ἄγαρ τῆς μητρὸς Ἰσμαήλ. Σαρακηνοὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἰπεῖν πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον, ὅτι (ὄτε?) ἀπελαθεῖσα παρὰ τῆς κυρίας αὐτῆς ὤδευε κατὰ τὴν ἔρημον ἐπιφερομένη τὸν Ἰσμαήλ, ὅτι Σάρρα κυρία με ἀπήλασε, ὡς ἐκεῖ λέγει”. PG 104:1448B.

74 PG 104:1396.

75 “Λόγος ἱστορικός Γρηγορίου τοῦ Δεκαπολίτου, πάνυ ὠφέλιμος καὶ γλυκύτατος κατὰ πολλὰ, περὶ ὀπτασίας, ἣν τις Σαβρακηνός ποτε ἰδὼν, ἐπίστευσε, μαρτυρήσας διὰ τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν”. PG 100:1201A-1212D. Daniel J. Sahas, “What an Infidel Saw that a Faithful Did Not. Gregory Dekapolites (d. 842) and Islam”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 (1986), 47–67.

76 “Ἐκθεσις ... καὶ καταδρομὴ πασῶν τῶν ἐμφερομένων δυσφημιῶν τῆ τοῦ Ἀραβος Μωάμετ βίβλῳ ...” PG 105:669–805, at 672C; also at 673A.

77 PG 105:713D.

he attacks *Ishmaelites* in a whole paragraph where he attempts “to demonstrate that the Ishmaelites are alienated from and foreign to the covenant of God”.<sup>78</sup> Although circumcised, they derive no benefit from the circumcision because they do not believe in the God of Abraham!<sup>79</sup> Thus, he treats the Arabs as *Hagarenes*, and the Muslims as *Ishmaelites*, possibly as illegitimate descendants of Abraham. The same treatment is found in emperor Michael’s (842–867) apologetic Exposition *Expositio demonstrativa Christiani dogmatis, ex communibus nationibus, et dialectica methodo, ac naturalibus argumentis; et syllogistico artificio deducta. Item refutatio Agarenorum epistolae ad Michaelem imperatorem, Theophili filium, misae ob accusandam Christianorum fidem*,<sup>80</sup> and in his Refutation *Confutatio et eversio secunda epistolae ab Agarenis misae as Michaelem imperatorem Theophili filium, ob accusandam Christianorum fidem*,<sup>81</sup> both attributed to the hand of Nicetas.

The purported Letter of Emperor Leo to ‘Umar (*Leonis imperatoris augusti cognomento philosophi as Omarum Saracenorum regem*) addresses him as “King of the *Saracens*”,<sup>82</sup> but this may only be an editorial rendering. Even if it were Leo’s own wording, the appellation as used could not, certainly, carry the early and directly pejorative connotation of “robber”, “invader”, or “barbarian”, given the official nature of the letter and its high level theological sophistication!

George Hamartolos (9th c.), writer of a particularly polemic chapter in his *Chronicon, Περὶ τοῦ ἀρχηγοῦ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν Μωάμεθ τοῦ καὶ Μουχοῦμετ* (“On the ruler of the *Saracens* Moameth, called also Muhumet”) <sup>83</sup> uses the name *Saracens* for Muslims, consistently. In fact at the end of the treatise he specifically states that “they were formerly known as Arabs, but *now* [are known] as *Saracens*, who left Arabia and have reached the area of Damascus ...” After winning the war against the Christians (and the juxtaposition here aims at underlining the non-Christian identity of the *Saracens*) they, “the cursed and polluted ones”, conquered Damascus and the entire territory of Phoenicea!<sup>84</sup> The context where the name *Saracens* occurs, suggests that for George and his contemporaries, if not from earlier, the Arab conquests and the fall of

78 PG 105:788B–792C.

79 PG 105:792–93 and 793–97.

80 Ἐκθεσις κατασκευαστικὴ μετὰ ἀποδείξεως τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ δόγματος ἐκ κοινῶν ἐνομιῶν, καὶ διαλεκτικῆς μεθόδου, καὶ φυσικῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων, καὶ συλλογιστικῆς πολυτεχνίας προαγομένη· καὶ ἀντίρρησης τῆς σταλείσης ἐπιστολῆς ἐκ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν πρὸς Μιχαὴλ βασιλέα υἱὸν Θεοφίλου ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως, PG 105:808–821.

81 Ἀντίρρησης καὶ ἀνατροπῆ τῆς δευτέρας ἐπιστολῆς τῆς σταλείσης παρὰ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν πρὸς Μιχαὴλ βασιλέα υἱὸν Θεοφίλου ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως, PG 105:821–841.

82 PG 107:315–324, extant only in Latin translation.

83 PG 110: 864–873.

84 Cf. PG 110:873C.

Damascus served as reminders of the earlier attacks of the Saracens against Syria. With Islam, the Saracens become also “cursed and polluted ones” – adjectives frequently used against Muhammad and the Muslims in relationship to marital practices and laws.<sup>85</sup>

Nicholas Mysticos, disciple of Photius, ecclesiastical diplomat and Patriarch of Constantinople (901–907, 912–925), acting as regent of the under-aged Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, wrote in 913/14<sup>86</sup> two letters with the generous title “Τῷ περιδόξῳ καὶ λαμπροτάτῳ ἀμηρᾷ τῆς Κρήτης καὶ ἡγαπημένῳ” (“To the honourable, eminent and dear Emir of Crete”)<sup>87</sup> during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muktadir (908–932) in support of the mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus who had been sent to Baghdad to secure the release of Cypriot prisoners of war, where among other things Nicholas wrote to the emir the following extraordinary words:

... there are two lordships, that of the Saracens and that of the Romans, which stand above every lordship on earth, and shine out like the two mighty beacons of the firmament. They ought, for this very reason alone, to be in contact and brotherhood and not, because we differ in our lives and habits and religion, remain alien in all ways to each other and deprive themselves of correspondence carried on in writing.<sup>88</sup>

Thus in naming them *Saracens*, Nicholas deals with the Arabs as lords and conquerors, not only with no apparent insulting tone or derogatory meaning in the name, but with a rather generous and complimentary tone. In fact, for Nicholas the Emir is “a most glorious (or widely renowned) ruler of the Saracens”,<sup>89</sup> and the Saracens are “law abiding people”.<sup>90</sup> He appears even as defending the pure faith of the Saracens, which the renegade Damian of Tarsus with his politically motivated conversion had adulterated.<sup>91</sup> Of

85 E.g. “ἐναγής” [for Muhammad], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:722C. “βέβηλος” [for Muhammad], in Bartholomeus 104:1444A. The adjectives of similar meaning used for the Saracen Muslims among Byzantine polemicists (such as ἀθέμιτος, αἰσχρός, ἀναίσχυντος, ἀνόσιος, βοσκηματώδης, ἔλεινός, ἡθονισταί, κατάρατος, κτηνώδης, παμβέβηλος, τρισάθλιος, χοιρώδεις) are many.

86 *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople. Letters.* Greek Text and English Translation by R.J.H. Jenkins and L.G. Westerink (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. xxx.

87 Jenkins, *Nicholas I*, pp. 2–12, 12–16.

88 Jenkins, *Nicholas I* p. 3.

89 “... ὃ μεγαλοδοξότατε τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἀρχηγέ”, Jenkins, *Nicholas I* p. 4C.

90 “... ἀντέστραπται παρὰ Σαρακηνοῖς τοῖς νόμῳ πολιτευομένοις ...”, Jenkins, *Nicholas I* p. 6A.

91 “... ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ὁ μήτε τὰ Χριστιανῶν στέρξας καὶ τὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν παρὰ φαῦλον θέμενος, Δαμιανὸν δὲ φησὶν ὁ λόγος...” Jenkins, *Nicholas I* p. 6A, and 8D.

course, this is an official and equally politically motivated letter in which Nicholas demonstrates his highly acclaimed skills in diplomatic language. But one would also say that Nicholas, the diplomat rather than the controversialist, did not have to go that far as to proclaim in his second letter a personal and most cherished friendship with the emir,<sup>92</sup> or call him “the best and most excellent one among my friends”.<sup>93</sup> Certainly Nicholas shows no signs of being aware of the early derogatory meaning and connotation of the name *Saracen*.

Samonas, Archbishop of Gaza, on his way to Emesa enters into a dialogue with a person by the name Ahmed, on the issue of the consecrated bread and the wine being truly body and blood of Christ, in its fullness.<sup>94</sup> Samonas’ interlocutor is “a wise man and of letters, Saracen of birth”.<sup>95</sup> In the end Ahmed accepts respectfully Samonas’ teaching, and acknowledges that “wonderful are, indeed, and extraordinary, supernatural, beyond the human mind, logic and utterance the mysteries of the faith of the Christians”.<sup>96</sup> Unlike other cases, in which a Muslim who comes into contact or dialogue with a Christian is converted to Christianity, Ahmed remains a Muslim. He expresses, however, his gratefulness to the bishop for putting forth a straightforward, sober and truthful argument by which it has been demonstrated to him that Christ is omnipotent, man loving, and true God, from whom every falsehood and every revery has been expelled!<sup>97</sup> The last statement is particularly important as, although called “true God” in actuality Christ is treated as a prophet and indirectly contrasted to Muhammad who in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature is presented as a false prophet, of empty words and teaching, deceptive, and the like.<sup>98</sup> Unlike such a litany of epithets of belittlement found elsewhere, this

92 “Ἀπάντων ὅσα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὁ βίος φέρεי καλὰ καὶ δι’ ὧν ἀνθρωπίνῃ ζωῇ κέκτεται τὸ ἦδύ, οὐδὲν οὕτω καλὸν οὐδὲ ἡδύτερον τοῖς φρονήσει κεκοσμημένοις ὡς κτήσις φιλίας καὶ ἡ περὶ ταύτην σπουδή”, Jenkins, *Nicholas I* p. 12C.

93 “... φίλων ἐμοὶ ἄριστε καὶ τιμιώτατε”, Jenkins, *Nicholas I* p. 12B.

94 *Διάλεξις πρὸς Ἀχμέδ τὸν Σαρακηνὸν ἀποδεικνύουσα τὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἱερέως ἱερουρούμενον ἄρτον καὶ ὄνον, σῶμα καὶ αἷμα ἀληθινὸν καὶ ὀλόκληρον εἶναι τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, PG 120:821–832.

95 “... ἐξ ὧν καὶ τις σοφὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ λόγιος, Σαρακηνὸς τὸ γένος”, PG 120:821A.

96 “Ὅντως θαυμαστά καὶ παράδοξα καὶ ὑπὲρ φύσιν καὶ νοῦν καὶ ἔννοιαν ἀνθρωπίνην τὰ τῆς πίστεως τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια”, PG 120:832C.

97 “Εὐχαριστῶ δέ σοι ὅτι καὶ ἡμῖν ἀπέδειξας ἄγαν ὀμαλώτατον, καὶ λείον, καὶ ἀληθὲς δόγμα, τὸν Χριστὸν παντοδύναμον, καὶ φιλόανθρωπον, καὶ ἀληθῆ Θεὸν ὑποδεικνύον, ἐξ οὗ ἀπελήλαται τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐξελλήλαται δὲ καὶ πᾶσα φαντασία”, PG 120:832D.

98 E.g. “ἄθεον καὶ δυσσεβὲς δόγμα [of Muhammad] in Abū Qurra, op. xxv, PG 97:1560A; “μηδὲν ἀληθὲς εἶπεν δυνηθεῖς”, Abū Qurra, op. xix, PG 97:1545A; ἄσεβις [Muhammad], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:7764D; “... κατὰ τὴν ἐνδειξιν τῶν αὐτοῦ ληρημάτων”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:740B; “τὰ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ μανιωδῶς καὶ δυσσεβῶς ρηθέντα ληρήματα”, in George Hamartolos, PG 110:869C; “λῆρος” [Qur’ān] in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:717B, 760C;

conversation takes place on a high level of mutual respect. Ahmed is, indeed, a *Saracen*; but such an appellation is used as a proper noun rather than as an adjective, and it carries no particular derogatory meaning.

In his broad *Compendium of History* covering the history from creation to 1057, George Cedrenos (12th c.) in a chapter dealing with Muhammad and Islam, repeats almost verbatim what Theophanes had to say about Muhammad, the “ruler of the Saracens and a pseudo-prophet”.<sup>99</sup> This writing, therefore, presents nothing different nor does it reveal the author’s own view or the usage of the name during his times. Similarly Euthymios Monachos, Zigabenos, (fl. ca. 1100) in the twenty eighth chapter of his *Panoplia Dogmatica* writes against the Saracens who are called Ishmaelites from Ishmael.<sup>100</sup> Zigabenos had a very limited personal knowledge of the Arabs and of Islam. His material is borrowed from earlier sources. For him the Qur’an contains “barbarian and

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“ληρωδίας συντάξας”, in John of Damascus 94:769B; “πρὸς τοὺς ὕθλους (nonsense) καὶ λήρους καὶ βεβήλους κενοφωνίας καταθέλγοντες” [Muslims], in George Hamartolos, PG 110:869B; “ληρωδήσας” [Muhammad], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:709C; “μυθάριον [Qur’an]”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:737A, 757A, 760C, 761A, 761B, 765C; “τὰ προειρημένα μυθεύματα προσκυνούσιν”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:777C; “ψευδῆ μυθεύματα αὐτοῦ [Muhammad]”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:724A; “τοιούτων τι μυθευσάμενος” [Muhammad], in George Hamartolos, PG 110:868B; “μυθικὸν σύγγραμμα” [Qur’an], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:713C; “μυθικός λόγος” [Qur’an], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:720A; “μυθογραφία καὶ βαρβαρική θρησκεία [Islam], πλαστή αὐτοῦ [Muhammad] ταύτη”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:709C; “μυθοεπία τῷ (by) Μωάμετ”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:729C; “μυθολογία τῷ (by) Μωάμετ”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:736B, 105:775C; “εἰς μυθολογίαν ψευδῆν τραπέις”, in Abū Qurra, op. XIX, PG 97:1545A; “μυθοπλαστία” [Qur’an], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:717B; “τοὺς τὴν ψυχὴν στρεβλωθέντας, διὰ τοῦ στρεβλοῦ αὐτοῦ μύθου” [Muhammad], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:733A, “παραλήρημα” [Qur’an], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:757B; “παράνοια [of Muhammad]”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:756C; “παραπαίων”, [Muhammad], in George Hamartolos, PG 110:869B, Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:737D; “καὶ οὐδὲ συναισθόμενος ὁ παραπαίων τῆς ἀθέου φλυαρίας”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:757BC; “φλῆναφος”(=idle talk, nonsense, babbling) [Qur’an, or in general Muhammad], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:729C, 736B, 752A, 756C, 756D, 760C, 760D, 761A, 761D; “χαύνωσις” [Qur’an], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:753C; “ψευδοπροφήτης” [Muhammad], in Abū Qurra, op. XX, PG 97:1545C; XXV, PG 97:1560A; Gregory Decapolites, PG 100:1203B, 1209A, 1209D; Theophanes, A.M. 6122, PG 108:684B; George Hamartolos, PG 110:864D; “ψεύστης” [Muhammad]: “ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ψεύσμασιν εὐρίσκειται κομπάζων” [Muhammad], in Abū Qurra, op. XX, PG 97:154D; Bartholomeus 104:1444A; “ψευσάμενος καὶ ματαιολογήσας [Muhammad]”, in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:740A; “ψευδεσθαι πάντως ἀνάγκη τὸν γράψαντα [Muhammad], in Nicetas Byzantios, PG 105:764B.

99 “ὁ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἀρχηγὸς ψευδοπροφήτης”, *Compedium Historiarum (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae)*, vol. 34, Bonn, 1838), p. 738.

100 “Κατὰ Σαρακηνῶν οἱ καλοῦνται Ἰσμαήλιται μὲν ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰσμαήλ καταγόμενοι ...”, PG 130:1332–1360.



silly things”, derived from Muhammad’s chatter and sick mind.<sup>101</sup> On the other hand, the same Zigabenos carries a dialogue on faith, in the city of Melitene, with a Muslim who is “a philosopher *Saracen*”.<sup>102</sup> The name *Saracen* here carries no longer an ethnic or national identity; it clearly means *Muslim*. By the time of Euthymios, the Muslims under the Abbasids had excelled in the arts and sciences and in their own midst there were competent interlocutors whose knowledge overshadowed any trace of “barbarian”, or *scenitic* culture. The difference between Zigabenos’s account on Islam in the *Panoplia Dogmatica* and this *Dialogue* (if the two are the products of the same hand) shows that the former is a wholesale and uncritical borrowing from previous sources, while the latter represents better Zigabenos’ own time and temperament. From a tent dweller, barbarian, robber, pillager of Syrian villages, the Saracen of Zigabenos becomes a philosopher who in the end, and under the rational arguments of his Christian interlocutor, exclaims “I have been defeated! I have been defeated! How great is the faith of the Christians! I am grateful to you for this knowledge of God, man of God. What you believe is what God reveals”; and, unlike the case of Samonas and Ahmed, he asks to be baptized: “Go ahead, then, servant of God; baptize me!”<sup>103</sup> Following this dialogue, another and very brief exchange has been included in the Migne corpus,<sup>104</sup> between a Christian and an “Ishmaelite”, on the Christian faith again, with no other indication or trace of the name, except that of “Ishmaelite” meaning *Muslim*.

Nicetas Choniates’ (ca. 1150–1213) chapter xx of his *Thesauri Orthodoxae fidei* is a treatise “On the religion of the *Hagarenes*”,<sup>105</sup> and a close reproduction of John of Damascus’ ch. 100/1 of the *De Haeresibus*. Choniates uses consistently the name *Hagarenes* except once, when he calls the Muslims *Saracens*.<sup>106</sup> However in another piece of his, the “*Order about the Saracens who return to the pure and true faith of us Christians*”,<sup>107</sup> Nicetas makes reference only to *Saracens*, and this purely as Muslims!

For the fourteenth-century emperor John VI Cantacuzenos (1347–1383), turned a monk under the name Ioasaph, a Muslim is a *Musulman*. Through the pen of a *Persian* Muslim (that is why the editor of the treatises, or

101 “Καὶ ἐν ἑτέροις ἄλλα τινὰ βαρβαρικὰ καὶ ἀνόητα, καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ φλυαρίας καὶ φρενοβλαβείας οὐκ ἀποδέοντα”, PG 130:1345B.

102 “Διάλεξις μετὰ Σαρακηνοῦ φιλοσόφου περὶ πίστεως ἐν τῇ πόλει Μελιτηνῆς”, PG 131:20–37.

103 PG 131:37C.

104 PG 131:37D–40B.

105 “Περὶ τῆς θρησκείας τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν”, PG 140:105–121.

106 PG 131:117D.

107 PG 140:124–136. On this see also, Daniel J. Sahas, “Ritual of Conversion from Islam to the Byzantine Church”, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36 (1991), 57–69.

Cantacuzenos himself, speaks of the Muslims as “Achaemenids”) who converted to Christianity, became a monk and assumed the name Meletios, Cantacuzenos exchanges letters, and composes four Apologies with a Persian (Shi‘ite?) Muslim.<sup>108</sup> As a former Muslim himself, Meletios has every reason to use the only appropriate name *Muslim* or *Musulman*, and find meaning only in such a name, instead of any other designation, such as Hagarene, or Saracen or Ishmaelite, let alone in any derogatory epithet, coming from non-Muslim sources.<sup>109</sup> By Nicetas’ time the Byzantines seem to have started understanding better the identity of the Muslims and calling them that which themselves wanted to be, Muslims, that is “people submitted to God”. Four other orations against Muhammad are attributed to the same Cantacuzenos.<sup>110</sup> In none of them is there any reference or inference to name-calling of Muslims.

In the same century the Latinizer Demetrios Cydones (*ca.* 1324–*ca.* 1398) translates Ricardo de Monte Cruce’s treatise against Muhammad and his “refutation of the legislation set for the Saracens by the cursed Muhammad”.<sup>111</sup> Here Cydonis (or Ricardo) deals consistently with *Saracens*, a name which he uses perhaps interchangeably (albeit rarely) with the name *Arabs*, or in combination as “Saracens *and* Arabs”.<sup>112</sup> The author attempts his own explanation of the name *Saracens*, away from the polemic inferences of the earliest uses and interpretations, but an imaginative one with no historical truth in it either:

Saracens are called saved. Because those who accept the commandments of Muhammad were protected by him and by those under him and they were neither put to death nor were they robbed. Thus the *Saracens* are not Saracens but *Neselamin* [a distortion of *Muslimin*] which is translated as ‘saved’; and they laugh at the Christians who claim that they are the saved ones.<sup>113</sup>

Here we have a populist, or possibly apologetic, interpretation of the name *Muslim* promulgated either by converts to Islam, or by Muslims defending Islam to Christians as *the* religion of redemption.

108 PG 154:372–584.

109 E.g. 154:380B; 381A; 393A; 393B and *in passim*.

110 PG 154:584–692.

111 *Demetrii Cydonii Translatio Libri Fratris Richardi, Ordinis Praedicatorum, Contra Mahometi*, PG 154:1037–1152.

112 “Οἱ δὲ Σαρακηνοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἄραβες ἐπὶ τούτῳ σεμνύνονται μάλιστα ...” PG 154:1057C.

113 “Ἐντεῦθεν καὶ οἱ Σαρρακηνοὶ λέγονται σεσωσμένοι. Οἱ γὰρ τὰς τοῦ Μαχοῦμετ δεχόμενοι ἐντολὰς ἐφυλάσσοντο καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκείνου· καὶ οὔτε ἐφόνευσον αὐτούς, οὔτε ἔλωποδύτου. Ὅθεν καὶ οἱ Σαρρακηνοὶ οὐ καλοῦνται Σαρρακηνοί, ἀλλὰ Νεσελαμίν· ὃ ἔρμηνεύεται σεσωσμένοι· καὶ καταγελῶσι τῶν Χριστιανῶν, λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς σεσωσμένους.” PG 154:1072D.

In his “Dialogues with a Persian” taking place in Ankara, Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425)<sup>114</sup> deals, as expected, with Muslims as *Turks* and *Persians*.<sup>115</sup> He appears not knowing the names *Saracens* or *Arabs*, although he knows that the scripture of these “Turks” and “Persians” is written and recited only in Arabic;<sup>116</sup> something which he criticizes as he contrasts it to the Christian practice!<sup>117</sup>

Finally, an anonymous, brief, and particularly hostile treatise on the life of Muhammad,<sup>118</sup> considered to be a latter piece but which, judging from its polemic character, may in fact be a very early writing, calls Muhammad “thrice cursed and utterly ungodly man who is surnamed by the *Hagarenes*, his subjects, Mahoumet and prophet”.<sup>119</sup>

Our conclusion is brief and admittedly general. The name *Saracens*, having gone through a great evolution in meaning (a negative and pejorative meaning) during the pre-Islamic times, provides for the Byzantine apologists and anti-Islamic writers (particularly those of Syrian descent) a convenient, and easily understood, characterization. This characterization in itself encompasses all the negative connotations which anti-Islamic polemicist may have wanted to convey about Islam and the Muslims, even without explaining further the history, the doctrine, the practice, the ethics and the institutions of Islam, as a religion, which they set themselves to refute. More often than not the name *Saracens* played the role of a signal and of a catch word, and it performed the function of (to use a modern computer jargon) a *macro*, which in a particular context contained in hiding such meanings as easterners, Bedouins, tent-dwellers, invaders, pillagers, uncovenanted people, Arab-related, robbers, barbarians, and the like. Progressively, however, as a result of the passing of time, or because of a better, more enlightened and informed understanding of the Muslims, especially of Arab Muslims, by some Byzantines, or because of the evolution of the Islamic state and of the status of the Muslims, or as a result of combination of all these factors, the name *Saracens* lost its ancient negative and rigid meaning. Not all Byzantines were aware of its early pejorative meaning, and fewer wanted to use it as such. Some of them, especially

114 “Μανουήλ τοῦ Παλαιολόγου ... Διάλογος ὄν ἐποιήσατο μετὰ τινος Πέρσου, τὴν ἀξίαν Μουτερίζη, ἐν Ἀγκύρα τῆς Γαλατίας”, PG 156:125–173.

115 PG 156:157A; 156:128.

116 PG 156:137D.

117 “Μετὰ γὰρ τὴν τῆς θρησκείας τοῦ Μωάμεθ φανέρωσιν ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ πάντως μόνοι εἰς τὴν ὑμετέραν φωνὴν ἡμεῖψατε τὴν Γραφὴν, ὅπερ ἐναντίως ἔχον τοῖς παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀποδεδεικται”. PG 156:137D.

118 *Anonymi Narratio de vita Mohammedis*, PG 158:1077–1080.

119 “Ὁ τρισκατάρατος καὶ ἀθεώτατος Μωάμεδ, ὃς καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Ἀγαρηνοῖς τοῖς αὐτῷ ὑπηκόοις Μαχούμετ ἐπονομάζεται καὶ προφήτης μέγας παρ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ ἴσα Θεῷ τιμώμενος ...” PG 158:1077B.

those who borrowed wholesale information and expressions from the early writers, used the name uncritically, with little historical or cultural comprehension. At its best circumstances the name came to connote a *Muslim*, although such cases are rather few. It seems also that the name was used in the general albeit disguised way of designating people of *Arab* culture and nationality; a designation which included the linguistic, cultural and religious dimension, like the names "Greeks", or "Persians".

## Saracens and Arabs in the *Leimon* of John Moschos

If for lack yet of a critical edition (a painstaking process in itself), the translation of the *Leimon*, or *Leimonarion*, widely known as *Pratum Spirituale*,<sup>1</sup> is only a tentative project,<sup>2</sup> how much more a thematic study based on its text! However, such a synthesis cannot be deemed unjustifiable, considering the popularity and importance of the work, the time and context of its

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- 1 Τοῦ Μακαρίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Εὐκράτᾳ Βίβλος, ἡ λεγομένη Λειμῶν διὰ τὸ πολυανθὴ βίων διήγησιν τῆς οὐρανοπόρου ῥοδωνίας φέρειν J.-P Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 87.3:2851; Greek text, 2852–3112; Latin text, *Patrologia Latina* 74:119–240. The text has been supplemented with additional texts considered by their editors as belonging to the *Leimon*: Theodor Nissen, “Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1938), 351–76; and Elpidio Mioni, “Il Pratum Spirituale di Giovanni Mosco: Gli episodi inediti del Cod. Marciano greco II.21”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodiaca* 17 (1951) 61–94. On the editions of *Leimon*, see P. Pattenden, “The editions of the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus”, *Studia Patristica*, Papers Presented to the 11th International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 1975, Pt. 1, ed. E.A. Livingston (Berlin, 1984), pp. 15–19; *idem*, “The Text of the *Pratum Spirituale*”, *Journal of Theological Studies* (new series) 26 (1975) 38–54. The popularity of the *Leimon*, its many manuscripts of various fragments and its many translations have made the collection of them and the production of a critical edition an enormous task. Cf. F. Nau, “Vies et récits d’anachorètes (IV–VII siècles)”, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 7 (1902), 604–17. The title and subtitle of the work appear as antinomical and they are particularly meaningful, given the fact that the work describes lives and experiences from the desert! The expression became common in the secular literature also. Cf. for example its use by Nicetas of Byzantium (second half of ninth century) praising emperor Michael III (842–67): “ποῦ γάρ μοι τοσαύτη χρυσέων ἐπῶν περιουσία, ὡς ἂν χρυσογραφήσαιμι, τὰς δίκην πολυανθοῦς λειμῶνος ἐξανθοῦσας τῶν ἀρετῶν αὐτοῦ λαμπρότητας καὶ τερπνότητας;” PG 105: 669A–B.
- 2 John Wortley, who has translated the text recently in English from Migne’s Greek and Latin edition, has eloquently and accurately described the perils of such endeavour. *The Spiritual Meadows (Pratum Spirituale) by John Moschos (also known as John Eviratus)*. Introduction, Translation and Notes by John Wortley. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992). Translator’s Note, pp. ix–xx. Various other editions and translations of the *Pratum Spirituale*, show the continuing interest in this text. *Giovanni Mosco. Il Prato*. Presentazione, traduzione e commento di R. Maisano (Napoli, 1982); *Jean Moschus, Le Pré Spirituel*. Introduction et traduction de M.-J. Rouët de Journel. Sources Chrétiennes 12 (Paris, 1946), *idem*, *Jean Moschus, Le Pré Spirituel*. Trad. préfacé et annoté (Paris, 1960); *Ἰωάννης Μόσχος, Λειμωνάριον*. Εἰσαγωγικά-μετάφραση-σχόλια. Theologos Stauroniketianos, (Hagion Oros: “Εκδοσις Ἱεράς Μονῆς Σταυρονικήτα, 1983); N. van Wijk, “Einige Kapitel aus Joannes Moschos in zwei Kirchenslavischen Übersetzungen”, *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie*, 10 (1933) 60–66; D.-C. Hesselning, *Morceaux choisis du Pré spirituel de Jean Moschos*. Collection de l’Institut Néo-hellénique de l’Université de Paris 9 (Paris, 1931).

composition.<sup>3</sup> The literature already produced and the sustained interest in the *Leimon*,<sup>4</sup> may in fact highlight further its importance and expedite its critical edition.<sup>5</sup> Under these circumstances remarks about Arab Saracens during the proto-Islamic period in the *Leimon* may well be taken as tentative.

What needs not be considered as tentative, however, is the recognition that the *Leimon* is one of those most significant sources from the grass-roots, about Eastern Mediterranean Byzantine society in the sixth century, not necessarily restricted to matters pertinent to the monastic community. For the student of Byzantine-Muslim relations the *Leimon* is even more significant. Its compiler, John Moschos (b. ca. 540–50, d. in 619 or 634), and his pupil Sophronios

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- 3 Although an old study, G. Levi Della Vida's "Le Stratagème de la Vierge' et la traduction arabe du 'Pratum spirituale' de Jean Moschus", *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d' Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 7 (1939–1944), 83–126, gives a description of manuscripts of the work, as well as of Arabic and other translations in which segments of the *Leimon* were rendered. See also an extensive reference to the ms editions and translations of the *Leimon* in Henry Chadwick, "John Moschos and his friend Sophronios the Sophist", *Journal of Theological Studies* (NS) 25 (1974) 41–74 [reprinted in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London, 1982, # XVIII)], at p. 43. Interestingly enough, although there have been many translations of the *Leimon* in Arabic under the name of Sophronios and with such titles as *Bustān ar-ruhbān* ("The Garden of monks") and more fully *Kitāb al-Bustān fī akhbār ar-ruhbān* (Book of the Garden about stories of the monks"), there is much less trace of its translation in the Syriac literature. Della Vida, "Le Stratagème de la Vierge", p. 91, n. 27. Such translations are mostly of segments based on the Greek and at times significantly different from it.
- 4 The literature on the *Leimon* is extensive. The following are selected titles, not including entries in dictionaries and encyclopedias. José Simon Palmer, *El Monacato Oriental en el Pratum Spirituale de Juan Mosco* (Madrid, 1993); J. Duffy and G. Vican, "A Small Box in John Moschos", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 24 (1983) 93–99; Chadwick, "John Moschos and his friend Sophronios the Sophist"; E. Kriaras, "Παρατηρήσεις στο 'Λειμωνάριο' του 'Ιωάννου Μόσχου", *Ελληνικά* 12 (1953) 376–79; Norman H. Baynes, "The 'Pratum Spirituale'", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 13 (1947) 404–14; G. Levi Della Vida, "Sulla versione araba di Giovanni Mosco e di Pseudo-Anastasio Sinaita secondo alcuni codici Vaticani", *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, vol. III [*Studie e Testi* 123 (1946) 104–115; Ioannes Phokylides, "Ἰωάννης ὁ Μόσχος καὶ Σωφρόνιος ὁ σοφιστῆς ὁ καὶ πατριάρχης Ἱεροσολύμων", *Νέα Σιών*, 13 (1913) 815–836; 14 (1914) 90–97, 185–201; J.-M. Saugey, *Le paterikon arabe de la Bibliothèque ambrosienne de Milan L120 sup.* (SP. II. 161) (1989); S. Vailé, "Jean Mosch", *Échos d' Orient* 5 (1901), 107–16.
- 5 Dr. Philip Pattenden of Cambridge informed me in 1991 that he has edited and translated the text of Moschos' *Leimon* in its extended form which is considerably longer and different from that in the Migne edition, which is due to be published by Brépol's in the *Corpus Christianorum* with an *editio minor* and French translation in *Sources Chrésiennes*. Dr. Pattenden also informed me that he has produced a separate English translation along with a commentary, now in its second draft, which he expected to complete during that year. I have been unable to locate any of these titles.

the Sophist (560–638), to whom the anthology was dedicated and by whom it was completed, the celebrated orator and ecclesiastic who as Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638) delivered the city to ‘Umar,<sup>6</sup> were both contemporary to Muhammad, whose life time coincides with the emergence of Islam and the first wave of its expansion. Thus the *Leimon* reflects the historical and cultural milieu within which Islam was born and spread, and as such it is a legitimate, indeed valuable, source of information about “Arabs” in Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Sinai, as well as of the way they were perceived by at least the contemplative and ascetic community in the region.

The *Leimon* speaks neither of Islam nor of Muslims; and this is important as this indicates that it is unaware of them and it presents an image of the Saracens rather than of Islam. It does not even mention the word “Arab” except once, in chapter 96, when reference is made to an elder (*geron*), “an Arab by race, although named Julian”.<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon is not unexpected, given the fact that the purpose of Moschos was to collect edifying stories, sayings and anecdotes about monks and hermits, for the benefit of those contemplatives spiritually inclined, in the tradition of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in the Christian, and in the manner the Hadith in the Islamic, literature.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the assumption of this paper is that the names “Saracens” and/or “barbarians” which appear in the text refer to “Arabs”, in the broad sense of the

6 On Sophronios, see the authoritative monograph by Christoph von Schönborn *Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, (Paris, 1972). On Sophronios and the capitulation of Jerusalem, see Daniel J. Sahas, “Patriarch Sophronios, ‘Umar, and the capitulation of Jerusalem” (Arabic translation in, *Al-sirā’ al-islāmi al-faranji ‘alā Filastīn fī al-qurun al-wusta*, edited by Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Burhan Dajani (Beirut, 1994), pp. 53–71. *Idem*, “The Covenant of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb with the Christians of Jerusalem” (in Arabic), in same as above, pp. 71–77. See Chapters 9 and 10 in the present volume.

7 “Ἐλεγον δὲ ἡμῖν [ἐν τῇ μονῇ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Θεοδοσίου (from above, 2953B)] καὶ τοῦτο περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἄλλος ᾧδε γέγονε γέρων, τὸ μὲν γένος Ἄραβ, τὸ δὲ ὄνομα Ἰουλιανός ... 2953B. The juxtaposition of race and name points, perhaps, to a Christianized Arab or Saracen. Such examples are stated in the *Leimon* and will be mentioned later. For the meaning of *geron* (elder), in contrast to *adelphos* (brother), see R. Maisano, “Sull’ uso del termine ἀδελφός nel Prato di Giovanni Mosco”, *Korinwía* 6 (1982), 147–154.

8 A comparative study of the content, style and purpose of Palladius’ (ca. 363–ca. 431) *Lausiac History*, the *Historia Monachorum* (fourth century), the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (fifth or sixth century), the *Leimon*, the *Vita* of St. Daniel of the Skete (d. after 576), and Anastasios Sinaites’ (d. after 700) works on the one hand (all of them widely circulating in Arabic and Syriac translations), and the Hadith on the other, is missing and long overdue.

word, although not necessarily Muslims.<sup>9</sup> Other sources, too, contemporary to the *Leimon*, name the Arabs as “barbarians”,<sup>10</sup> “Saracens”,<sup>11</sup> and “Ishmaelites”,<sup>12</sup> the latter being an earlier appellation.<sup>13</sup>

Direct information about Arabs in the *Leimon* is rather meagre, scattered, and at times obscure. Out of 219 stories<sup>14</sup> one can identify about a dozen of

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- 9 For the difficulties in defining the name “Arab” and for its reference in the Byzantine sources before and at the time of Islam, see the extensive works of Irfan Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs: a prolegomenon to the study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington D.C. 1984), especially pp. 123–141; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fourth century* (Washington, D.C. 1984), especially pp. 278–83; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fifth century* (Washington, D.C. 1989); and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C. 1994). See also Elizabeth M. Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature”, The 17th International Byzantine Congress. Major Papers (Washington, D.C., August 3–8, 1986) (New York, 1986), pp. 305–323 where (especially p. 312) an explanation as to why Arabs feature fragmentarily in the Byzantine literature. The topic continues to attract the attention of scholars. See, *Présence arabe dans le Croissant fertile avant l’Hégire. Actes de la Table ronde internationale (Paris, 13 Novembre 1993), Texts réunis par Hélène Lozachmeur* (Paris, 1995), especially the studies by F. Israel, “L’onomastique arabe dans les inscriptions de Syrie et de Palestine”, pp. 47–58, and M.C.A. Macdonald, “Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes, l’inscription de Rawwāfa et l’armée romaine”, pp. 93–102.
- 10 Cf. “Vie et récits de l’abbé Daniel de Scété (VI<sup>e</sup> siècle)”, *Revue de l’Orient chrétien* 5 (1900), p. 70. However, in one instance in Mioni’s additions (# VII, p. 89) the characterization “barbarian” is ascribed clearly to the Persians.
- 11 Cf., for example, the sixth-century writing of *Der heilige Theodosios. Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrillos*, ed. H. Usener (Leipzig, 1890), p. 83, and the seventh-century *vita* of St. Anastasios the Persian, ed. [Bernard Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l’histoire de la Palestine au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 1, Les textes (Paris, 1992)] p. 103, 5-7. On this edition, see Alexander Kazhdan, “Two Notes on the Vita of Anastasios the Persian; in *Φιλέλληγ. Studies in honour of Robert Browning*, ed. Costas N. Constantinides et al. (Venice, 1996) 151–87. On the name “Saracens”, cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “Saracens and the Syrians in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature and before”.
- 12 Cf. P. Van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune (521–592)*, I, (Bruxelles 1962), p. 176.
- 13 Sozomenos (first half of the 5th c), whose *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία* is a continuation of Eusebios’ for the years 324–439, speaks extensively of the Saracens. *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by J. Bidez and G.C. Hansen (Berlin, 1960), VI, 38, pp. 297–300. He states explicitly that their original name was “Ishmaelites”: “Τούτι γάρ τὸ φύλον ἀπὸ Ἰσμαήλ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ παιδὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβὼν καὶ τὴν προσηγορίαν εἶχε, καὶ Ἰσραηλίτας αὐτοὺς οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἀπὸ τοῦ προπάτορος ὀνόμαζον, ἀποτριβόμενοι δὲ τοῦ νόθου τὸν ἔλεγχον, καὶ τῆς Ἄγαρ τῆς Ἰσμαήλ μητρὸς τὴν δυσγένειαν (δοῦλη γὰρ ἦν) Σαρακηνοὺς σφὰς ὀνόμασαν ὡς ἀπὸ Σάρρας τῆς Ἀβραάμ γαμετῆς καταγομένους” (*Ἱστορία*, VI, 38, 10; ed. Bidez, pp. 299). The Ishmaelites assumed the name *Saracens* with the meaning of “descendants of Sarrah”, in order to reverse the negative connotation which the names “Ishmaelites” or “Hagarenes” carried pointing to the humble origin of their mother Hagar, the slave concubine of Abraham, and to their illegitimacy.
- 14 Migne’s edition contains 219 stories. Photius’ *Bibliotheca*, ch. 198, describes most likely Moschos’ *Leimon* with 304 stories. *Photius Bibliothèque*, vol. III, ed. René Henry (Paris,



them in which “Saracens” and “barbarians” (or “Barbarians”, as if it were a proper name) are referred to directly. The supplementary stories provided by Nissen and Mioni,<sup>15</sup> as well as those five additional ones offered by Pattenden, if indeed they belong to Moschos, make no reference to Arabs, offer no additional information, and they do not alter their image.<sup>16</sup> Given the sparsity of information on the pre-Islamic Arabs in the Byzantine sources in general,<sup>17</sup> any attempt at a systematic presentation of the Arabs or Saracens in the *Leimon* in terms of occupation, political organizations, customs, faith, etc, would be artificial and exaggerated. However, what is important in this sparse harvest of evidence is the kind of information and the affirmation of relevant information about an otherwise obscure social history, geography, life style and culture of Arab populations in the sixth century, among whom Islam struck roots and spread.

In general, the uniform description of Arabs in the *Leimon*, not without some exaggeration, is rather uncomplimentary. Arabs are depicted as very poor, violent, savage nomads, caravan drivers involved in robbery and slave trafficking, who assault monks, burn monasteries and raze them to the ground leaving their inhabitants destitute. Such a description conforms with the long held impression of the Byzantines since the fourth century,<sup>18</sup> attested to in the literature and corroborated by hagiological writings contemporary to the *Leimon*.<sup>19</sup> In St. Theodosius (d. 529), for example, we have an unequivocal description of Saracens who have attacked in great numbers his monastery at night, burned it, stolen everything inside, and taken most of the monks captives.<sup>20</sup> In the *Leimon* such reports are amplified and presented in graphic details. Thus abba

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1962), pp. 95–96. Wortley’s translation contains 231 stories, including Nissen’s and Mioni’s additions.

- 15 The rather peripheral linguistic evidence of the word “ἀμηράς” used by Nissen (#8, pp. 361–5) as proof of Moschos’ authorship of one of these stories, needs not, we think, be taken into consideration at this time. The word “amir” may be too important and authoritative for a chief, or “head of a village” (“τὸν καθεδράριον τοῦ χωρίου τὸν καὶ ἀμηρᾶν λεγόμενον”). See also below, n. 70.
- 16 “The Text of the *Pratum Spirituale*”, pp. 49–54.
- 17 Vassilios Christides has made a valiant effort to collect evidence from Byzantine geography, history and chronography, hagiography, illuminations, papyri and inscriptions. “The image of the pre-Islamic Arab in the Byzantine sources” (Ph. D. Dissertation, Princeton University 1970).
- 18 Cf. Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature”, pp. 305–323.
- 19 For references to Arabs in hagiological texts, Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fourth century*, pp. 293–318.
- 20 “βραχέος τινὸς διπεύσαντος χρόνου Σαρακηνῶν νύκτωρ ἐπελθὼν πλῆθος τὸ μὲν εἰρημένον ἔπρησαν μοναστήριον, κεκλοφότες δὲ τὰ ἔνδον ἅπαντα αἰχμαλώτους τοὺς πλείονας τῶν μοναχῶν λαβόντες ὤχοντο”, *Der heilige Theodosios Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrillos*, ed. H. Usener, Leipzig, 1890, p. 83.

Gerontios, abbot of the monastery of Euthymios<sup>21</sup> and a contemporary to Moschos,<sup>22</sup> relates an incident according to which three ascetics, including the narrator himself, spotted a group of Saracens travelling along the coast from a high place called Besimont, beyond the Dead Sea.<sup>23</sup> The monks noticed that one of the Saracens broke away from the company, attacked a shepherd monk and killed him. At that time a bird of prey descended upon the assailant, lifted him up in the air and let him fall to the ground and be killed.<sup>24</sup>

The incident which might have taken place near the monastery of Euthymios and with Gerontios being an eye witness, presents the Saracens not as permanent inhabitants, but rather as travellers, or pillagers, or possibly transient workers,<sup>25</sup> roaming the coast of the Dead Sea.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the celebrated story of St. Gerasimos (d. 475) narrated in chapter 107<sup>27</sup> speaks of “camel drivers [coming] from [the province of] Arabia”,<sup>28</sup> who found the donkey of St. Gerasimos by the Jordan River unattended and stole it. At this point the exchange, substitution or addition of a donkey to a seemingly camel-caravan is very interesting; it may be indicating local Saracens living in Palestine where

21 The monastery of St. Euthymios, located on the high plateau of Mishor Adummin almost one third of a distance between Jerusalem on the one hand and Jericho and the Dead Sea on the other, was founded by Euthymios (d. 473) in the fifth century and survived until the eleventh century. Its ruins can be still seen at Khan el Amar. On the monastery of St. Euthymios, its founding, conversion from a lavra to a *koinovion*, its description, organization, and life, see Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven-London, 1992), in *passim*.

22 “Ο ἀββάς Γερόντιος ὁ ἡγούμενος τῆς μονῆς τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Εὐθυμίου διηγήσατό μοι λέγων...” PG 87.3:2868B. Emphasis is ours.

23 “Τρεῖς ἡμεθα βοσκοὶ πέραν τῆς Νεκρᾶς θαλάσσης, ὡς ἐπὶ Βησιμουῦντα” 2868B. Elsewhere the *Leimon* refers to the “Vetasimos gorge” (3021C), which most likely is the same as this “Besimont”; see below, n. 55. The place must be in the region of the Dead Sea, but its exact location unknown. I owe this information to my colleague Yizhar Hirschfeld.

24 ch. 21, PG 87.3: 2868B–C.

25 According to the *Vita sancti Euthymii* 15, Saracen tribesmen were employed by Euthymios to build his lavra; ed. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, p. 24.17.

26 A hint as to the permanent locality of the Saracens is provided by the almost contemporary *Vita* of St. Symeon the Stylite the Younger (521–592), which suggests that the Saracens lived by, or between the borders of the Persians and the Romans [Byzantines]: “πλησίον τῶν ὁρίων Σαρακηνῶν (other mss spell the name *σαρακενῶν*, or *σαρακινῶν*) Περσῶν τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων”; *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune (521–592)*, ed. P. Van den Ven, vol. 1, (Bruxelles 1962), p.165.

27 PG 87.3:2965C–2969B. This impressive story of loyalty of a lion to the saint has appeared as an independent story from the *Leimon* and in different languages, including Syriac. Cf. Della Vida. “Le ‘Stratagème’”, p. 91, n. 27. The lavra of St. Gerasimos was located “one mile from the holy river of Jordan” (2965C).

28 “... καμηλάριοι ἐρχόμενοι ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας ...” PG 87.3:2968B.

donkeys rather than camels were the predominant means of transportation. Such caravans were crossing the Judean desert on their way to Jerusalem to sell wheat.<sup>29</sup> Bread being the main staple in the diets of monks, wheat was imported from the Transjordan and elsewhere, and paid in cash. Cyril of Scythopolis reports that the steward of the lavra of St. Sabas (Mar Saba) hired Saracens to transport wheat from the Dead Sea by camel.<sup>30</sup> The expression "... καμηλάριοι [ἐρχόμενοι] ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας ..." was, apparently, too vague a topography for the translators of this story into Arabic found in a thirteenth-fourteenth century manuscript, who might have known better. They replaced it with the more specific identification "al-Balaqā", for the region of the Transjordan across the lower valley of the Jordan where is the monastery of Kalamon.<sup>31</sup>

The story of abba Gerontios mentioned above raises the question of how the monks were able to identify the attackers as Saracens from a distance, unless we have a stereotype operating here. Fabricius has suggested that an identification was possible because, perhaps, of their distinct clothing; something which chapter 68 of the Acts of the IV Lateran Council of 649, "Περὶ φίγξεως (σφίγξεως? στίξεως?) σχήματος Χριστιανῶν", seems to support. It states: "Ἐν ταῖς ἐπαρχίαις παρὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἢ Σαρακηνοὺς ἢ τῶν ἐνδυμάτων διαστέλλει διαφορά· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τισιν οὕτως τις ἐπηύξησεν σύγχυσις, ὡς μηδεμίαν διαφορὰν διαιρήσεται ...".<sup>32</sup>

The violent reputation of the Saracens is confirmed by a story which the perpetrator himself narrates.<sup>33</sup> He went hunting to the mountain of abba Antonios. There he saw a monk whom he approached with an intension to kill. The monk stretched his arm and ordered the Saracen to stand still. The assailant remained immobilized for two days. He was released by the monk only after he had asked for forgiveness: "Τὸν Θεόν, ὃν σέβεις, ἀπόλυσόν με" ("In the name of God *whom you revere*, release me"). And the monk dismissed him in peace ("Πορεύου εἰς εἰρήνην").<sup>34</sup> The story provides us with a number of historical clues. The incident took place in Egypt, presumably near the lavra

29 87.3:2968C.

30 *Vita Sabas* 81, ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythoplis* (Leipzig, 1939), p. 186. Cf. Yizhar Hirschfeld, "The importance of bread in the diet of monks in the Judean desert", *Byzantion* 66 (1996), pp. 143–50 + photos to p. 155, at 144–45.

31 This truncated Arabic manuscript which once belonged to the Theological Seminary of New Brunswick, New Jersey, has been deposited at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Cf. Della Vida. "Le 'Stratagème", pp. 84, 96.

32 *PG* 87.3: 2867–8, note (h): "In the [eastern?] Provinces what distinguishes the Christians from the Jews and the Saracens is the difference in clothing. But among some of them there is such confusion that one cannot tell the difference among them".

33 Chapter 133, *PG* 87.3: 2996D–2997A.

34 *PG* 87.3: 2997A.

of St. Anthony. Since the Saracen himself related his experience to Moschos and Sophronios, we must assume that the two spiritual brothers collected the story during their journey to Egypt, most likely the first one (578/9–584) before Sophronios' tonsure, and even at the beginning or at the end of it; the hero of the story narrated his experience to Moschos and Sophronios, and to monks living specifically in Κλίσμα (= Suez)!<sup>35</sup> The two spiritual brothers undertook their first journey not only for their own spiritual edification but also in order to offer support to the Orthodox in Egypt at a time when the majority of the Christians, especially the illiterate ones, were monophysites.<sup>36</sup> We can also assume safely that this former Saracen converted himself to Christianity and he became a monk. Conversions to Christianity and to monasticism as the result of miraculous or courageous acts of monks or nuns are not rare in the *Leimon*.<sup>37</sup> This particular Saracen was pagan (“Ἕλληγ”);<sup>38</sup> something which allows us to suggest that the *Leimon* recognizes and implies that there were Saracens who were also Christians.

A very similar incident is narrated in chapter 99.<sup>39</sup> A monk by the name Ianthous of the lavra of Calamon,<sup>40</sup> near the Jordan River, was attacked by a band of Saracens in the wilderness of Koutila where he had withdrawn. One of them raised his sword against the monk with the intention to kill him. The monk prayed that God's will be done and, suddenly, the earth opened and swallowed the Saracen! Ascetic monks were particularly vulnerable to bandits, as in this case, where Ianthous had apparently withdrawn for stricter *askesis* and prayer into the wilderness of Koutila, in the Judean desert, between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, near the monastery of Theoctistos. The story does not allow us to speculate why the Saracens attacked the monks. More plausible reasons

35 “Διηγῆσατο Σαρακενὸς τις Ἕλληγ εἰς τὸ Κλίσμα τοῖς πολιτευομένοις, καὶ ἡμῖν λέγων, . . .” 87.3: 2996D. Emphasis is ours.

36 Schönborn, *Sophrone*, p. 60. Schönborn places their visit to Stephen of Alexandria, the philosopher, a monophysite who became orthodox, between the years 581 and 583. *Ibid.* 59, n. 22.

37 Cf. a similar story of conversion of a young man (not mentioned as being a Christian or not) who had fallen in love with a nun because of her beautiful eyes and wanted to seduce her; he repented for his lust and became a novice when he saw her plugging out her eyes in order to avoid him. Ch. 60, PG 87.3: 2912D–2913B, and the story of abba Nicholas (chapter 155) below.

38 Cf also ch. 136, PG 87.3: 3000B, where abba Sissinios questions a Saracen woman, in Hebrew, whether she was a “Christian, or Greek [Ἕλληγ]”.

39 PG 87.3: 2957C.

40 For description and daily life in the lavra, see Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, in passim.

would be in order to rob them of their meagre food and goods, or money, rather than out of religious antipathy.

“Blood thirsty Barbarians” are to be found especially in Egypt and the Thebaid.<sup>41</sup> Abba Irenaeos narrates that he was forced to abandon the Skete where he was living and come to Gaza because “Barbarians” had raided his sell.<sup>42</sup> The context and the reference to Skete, as if it were a proper name, may imply the monastic community in the Nitrian oasis (Wadi Natrūn). In another story Saracens are presented as extortionists who took captive the secretary of Patriarch Alexander of Theoupolis,<sup>43</sup> a man who had stolen Alexander’s money and fled to Thebaid. Alexander freed his unfaithful secretary by paying eighty five coins to his captors. A small detail in the text suggests that the “barbarians” were not living in cities but “in the depths of their country” (“πρὸς τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς αὐτῶν ἄγουσι χώρας”),<sup>44</sup> meaning perhaps “in the deep desert”. Another story presents the Saracens as traders, and slave traders at that. In ch. 152<sup>45</sup> abba Markellos Sketiotes (i.e., of the Skete) of the lavra of Monidia tells his story of how he became a monk at the Skete, where he stayed for thirty five years, “until the Barbarians came, sold me [him] in Pentapolis and turned the Skete desolate”.<sup>46</sup> The reference here must be to Pentapolis of Libya in North Africa, the province formed of five cities, long subjected to the attacks of local tribes, particularly the Austuriani and the Mazikes.<sup>47</sup> Chapter 112<sup>48</sup> specifically identifies the “barbarians” as the Mazikes (Μάζικες), presenting them as extortionists and violent. They were nomads, who lived in tents (*skenitae*),<sup>49</sup> razed the land, seized captives and killed many monks. The “Barbarians” of the story demanded extortion money for captive monks, while other monks were kept slaves. The hero, abba Leo, in order to free three feeble brethren of his, offered himself in their place. His offer was accepted but, when he became weak and unable to produce the work which his captors demanded, they beheaded him.

41 Ch. 34, PG 87.3: 2884A–B.

42 “Ὅτε ἦλθον Βάρβαροι εἰς τὴν Σκήτιν, ἀνεχώρησα, καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὰ μέρη Γάζης, καὶ ἔλαβόν μοι κελλίον εἰς λαύραν”; ch. 55, PG 87.3: 2909B.

43 This story has been taken from the *Vita divi Alexandri patriarchae Jerosolymitani* (PG 87.3: 2884). But, as Wortley remarks, Theoupolis which the story mentions as the seat of patriarch Alexander and of patriarch Theodotos in chapter 33, can refer either to Jerusalem or to Antioch. Wortley opts for the latter. *The Spiritual Meadow*, pp. 241–2.

44 PG 87.3: 2884A.

45 PG 87.3: 3017A–3021B.

46 “... ἕως οἱ Βάρβαροι ἦλθον, καὶ ἐπώλησάν με εἰς Πεντάπολιν, καὶ τὴν Σκήτιν ἐρήμωσαν”, PG 87.3: 3017B.

47 Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York-Oxford, 1991), p. 1625.

48 PG 87.3: 2976B–2977B.

49 “... καὶ ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς τὰς σκηνάς αὐτῶν”, 2977A.

The story contains a significant historical allusion, that the episode was collected by Moschos and Sophronios at the beginning of Tiberius' I reign, obviously during their first journey to Egypt.<sup>50</sup> Tiberius I, known also as Tiberius II became emperor on September 26, 578 and died on August 14, 582. Although tolerant, he had to put up with persecutions against pagans and Monophysites (both of them represented or implied in this story); a reason, perhaps, why the Chalcedonian Moschos calls him here a "most faithful Caesar" ("τοῦ ... καὶ πιστοτάτου Καίσαρος"). The two travellers met with abba Leo himself in Oasis ("Ὡασίς").<sup>51</sup>

At this point one may want to remark that, if Saracens were such ruthless enemies of the monks as the *Leimon* presents them, the change which took place in their attitude and conduct towards them with the advent of Islam was, indeed, revolutionary. The traditional life of Muhammad, as it is recorded in the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq, is dotted with episodes of pleasant and mutually beneficial encounters between him and Christian monks. Ascetics and monks received Muhammad warmly, offered him hospitality, and even proclaimed him as the expected prophet. Most notable among them was the legendary monk Bahira.<sup>52</sup> But, even before these later traditions which had been conditioned by the Muslim-Christian encounter and controversies, the Qur'ān itself had emphatically praised and pointed to Christian monks as true "Muslims", in the seminal meaning of the word, for being men of humility and submission to the will of God:

Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe [i.e., to the Muslims] those who say: Lo! We are Christians. This is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud.

Sūrah 5: 82

Earliest Islam emulated much of the monastic practice, style of life and its ethos of humility, compassion, and obedience to God; traits which the *Leimon*

50 "Ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς Τιβερίου τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ πιστοτάτου Καίσαρος ... Ἡμεῖς δὲ εἰς συντυχίαν αὐτοῦ [of Abba Leo] ἐλθόντες ..." PG 87.3: 2976B.

51 The name "Ὡασίς" may be a misspelling for ὄασίς (= oasis), implying perhaps Nitria (Wadi Natrūn).

52 On Bahira see, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, transl. Alfred Guillaume (London, 1968<sup>2</sup>) pp. 79–81; Armand Abel, "Bahira" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Ed. 1960; Louis Boisset, "Complements à l'édition de la version arabe de la légende de Bahira", *Parole de l'Orient* (Actes du 3<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes) 16 (1990–1991), pp. 123–131.

enunciates.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting that such a perception of Christian monks has been recorded in a *sūrah* which belongs to the Medinan period (622–632), close to the time of Moschos and Sophronios, long after Muhammad had clashed and broken relations with the Jewish community.

Hostage taking is mentioned in another story in chapter 155, albeit with a particular twist.<sup>54</sup> It is related by abba Jordan the shepherd about abba Nicholas from Betasimos, or Besimont, gorge.<sup>55</sup> The episode took place during the time of Emperor Maurice [582–602], when Names “ruler of the Saracens” was plundering (τὴν πραιίδα πεποίηκεν) the area of Annon and Aidon.<sup>56</sup> Abba Nicholas saw three Saracens holding a very handsome-looking twenty year old man from Tyre hostage. Nicholas begged them to let the young man free and take him prisoner instead. As they did not heed to his plea, the monk prostrated in prayer. Suddenly the Saracens became possessed of demons, drew their swords and started cutting each other to pieces. Abba Nicholas took the youth to his cave. The young man renounced the world and lived as a monk for seven years until his death. What is of particular interest in this story is that, according to the narrative, one of the Saracens responded to abba Nicholas *in Greek*,<sup>57</sup> and that the Saracens were not interested in the ransom money that the monk offered them but in the young man whom they wanted to offer as a special sacrificial gift to their “priest”.<sup>58</sup> The practice of human sacrifice by Ishmaelites (an earlier name for the Saracens) is mentioned by Eusebios.<sup>59</sup> The *Leimon* presents a picture of the Saracens’ conduct consistent with that described by Muslim writers who, with the fervour of the early Muslim converts, depicted pre-Islamic life and morals with the darkest possible colours and a considerable exaggeration; that was, indeed, a *jāhiliyah*, or period of ignorance and darkness. According to Ibn Ishāq, those earliest converts to Islam who took refuge in Abyssinia described their pre-Islamic civilization to Negus as follows:

53 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “Monastic ethos and spirituality and the origins of Islam”, in Ihor Ševčenko and Gennady G. Litavrin (eds.), *Acts of the XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Selected Papers: Main and Communications*, Sheperdstown, WV, 1996, Vol. II, pp. 27–39. See Chapter 5 in this volume.

54 *PG* 87.3: 3024B–C.

55 Cf. ch. 154, *PG* 87.3: 3021C. On the name and location of the gorge, see also above, n. 23.

56 Annon may be the Biblical name Arnon, the major stream east of the Dead Sea, opposite of Ein Gedi. I owe this information to my colleague Yizhar Hirschfeld.

57 “Ὁ δὲ εἰς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἀπεκρίθη μοι Ἑλληνιστί, καὶ λέγει ...”, *PG* 87.3: 3024B.

58 “Ὁὐ δυνάμεθα δοῦναί σοι αὐτόν· ἐπειδὴ τῷ ἱερεὶ ἡμῶν συνεταξάμεθα, ὅτι εἶ τι καλὸν αἰχμαλωτίσωμεν, προσφέρομέν σοι αὐτό, ἵνα θυσίαν αὐτὸ προσαγάγῃς”, *PG* 87.3: 3024C.

59 *Preparatio evangelica*, IV. 16–17; Jeffreys, “The Image”, 310. Cf. also above, n. 13.

O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly, and our strong devoured our weak ...<sup>60</sup>

The story of abba Nicholas seems to support the last two attributes of the Saracens. The young captive from Tyre may have been a Saracen himself. In the words of abba Nicholas [... καί οὐκέτι ἠθέλησεν ἀναχωρῆσαι ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ἀλλ' ἀπετάξατο ...] one may want to see here conversion of a Saracen to Christianity, denial of his previous life (ἀπετάξατο) and induction to the monastic life. The example of the young Saracen from Tyre finds parallels in hagiological accounts about other Arab Ishmaelites who had been profoundly attracted by the virtues of Christian ascetics. It is said in the *Vita* of St. Symeon the Stylite the Younger that Ishmaelites (the name, evidently, indicates non-Christians) came to pay their respects to him, and even gave thanks to Christ and to his servant the saint “for his benevolence to them”.<sup>61</sup>

One of the most interesting stories of benevolence of monks toward Christianized Saracens is found in chapter 136.<sup>62</sup> A Saracen woman entered the cell of abba Sissinios, the anchorite, near the Jordan River. She sat before him as the monk was singing the Third Hour and began undressing herself. The monk continued his prayer calmly until he completed his canon. He then asked the woman who she was, what she wanted and whether she was a Christian or a pagan. Her response was that she wanted to tempt him sexually for money because she was hungry with nothing to eat. The monk sent her off admonishing her to return daily and share with him whatever food he happened to have.

The story provides us with a number of interesting points, and presents us with a number of intricate problems: Sissinios spoke to the woman “in Hebrew” (“λέγω αὐτῇ Ἑβραϊστὶ ...”).<sup>63</sup> Was there any Jewish characteristic in the woman, or was Hebrew the only language which Sissinios was able to speak? The woman answered that she was a Christian; a Christianized Jewess, or a Christianized Arab? The question of language in this story is, indeed, puzzling. One must admit also that the woman's action was undoubtedly daring. Her action not only shows desperation, but a great deal of naiveté and a gross ignorance of the monastic ideals and of its strict code of ethics, as well, especially on sexual matters. A very different story, but on a similar theme, is narrated in

60 *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 151.

61 Van den Ven, *La vie ancienne*, p. 176.

62 *PG* 87.3: 3000A–B.

63 Or in Aramaic? Inscriptions found during the most recent excavations in En Gedi are in Hebrew and Aramaic; something which shows that the two languages were freely interchanged. I owe this information to my colleague Yizhar Hirschfeld.



chapter 160 by abba Paul, abbot of the monastery of abba Theognios.<sup>64</sup> A monk was sitting in his cell weaving baskets [καπίσκια] while at the same time he was composing songs and verses.<sup>65</sup> Suddenly a young Saracen entered his cell holding a μαζζάριον.<sup>66</sup> He started dancing, making songs and composing verses, and asked the aged monk: “Am I dancing well?” The monk did not answer him. The young lad persisted, “What do you think? Are you doing something important? I am telling you, in your sixty-fifth, and in your sixty-sixth and in your sixty-seventh [year of age?] you have led yourself astray”. The monk stood up, performed a prostration, and the vision disappeared. The moral of the story meant, perhaps, to be that making music and composing verses, for entertainment, was a pagan practice; and, although such an endeavour was allowed in traditional societies for musicians and love poets (even though it was looked down upon as being something of dubious morality), it is something totally inappropriate for monks. In this instance it is a Saracen who, as a symbol perhaps of such worldly or immoral endeavours, is presented as the tempter! Here also we have an allusion to Saracen dancing, in which baskets or trenchers were perhaps used as part of the performance, either for beating them or for balancing them on the head while swirling. Does, perhaps, the *Leimon* have in mind here the *mukhannathūn*, or the “effeminate ones” of the early Medina?<sup>67</sup>

One of the most intriguing of the stories is that which Nissen published as # 8 in his *addenda*,<sup>68</sup> and which he finds its equivalent in chapter 196.<sup>69</sup> It takes place in a populous (πολύανδρος) town of Palestine, rather than in the desert, and it involves not monks but city dwellers, Christians and Jews under the administration of an “emir”. The word “emir” or “amir”, not found elsewhere in the *Leimon*, makes the story suspect of being a later interpolation, dating

64 PG 87.3: 3028 B–C. Born in Cappadocia, Theognios spent some time as monk at the monastery of Theodosios, and at the lavra of Kalamon, and again at Theodosios’ before founding his own homonymous monastery south of Theodosios, and a short distance east of Bethlehem. He was called to serve as bishop of Bethulion near Gaza, after which he returned to his monastery where he died in the year 526. On Theognios, see *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (ed. Schwartz), pp. 241–43.

65 Basket weaving was one of the most common handicrafts of ascetics and monks. We may assume that *kaniskia* were the larger baskets while the *spourides* which Paul of Elousa, monk of the monastery of Theognios and biographer of its founder, were the small baskets, used for serving bread. *Vita sancti Theognii*, in *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (ed. Schwartz), p. 7, 86.4–5; Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*, p. 105.

66 A basket, or trencher, for barley bread.

67 Cf. Everett K. Rowson, “The Effeminate of early Medina”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991), pp. 671–93.

68 “Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale”, pp. 361–65.

69 PG 87.3: 3080D–3084A.

from the Islamic period.<sup>70</sup> It is a story of eucharistic content, and with a predominant anti-Jewish flavour and purpose. Some young boys of Christian and Jewish parents, or masters, were grazing their animals in the field. There the boys thought to ordain a bishop, a presbyter, a deacon, a subdeacon and readers among themselves (an interesting attestation to the priestly ranks), and celebrate the Eucharist. A Jewish boy in the company, the son of the High Priest, begged the others to include him in the action. They in turn baptized him and accepted him as their co-celebrant. At the moment of the sanctification, a fire swept the gifts away and left the young boys unconscious. Three days later the boys were found by their parents. When the high priest discovered what had happened, enraged he bribed the caretaker of the emir's bath to throw his son into the furnace the moment the fire was hot. But when the caretaker threw the boy into the fire the furnace cooled off. When the emir discovered the plot he had the priest beheaded. All the boys were placed in a monastery where they were treated according to the rank of ordination to which they had ordained themselves! There are also other stories in the *Leimon* where acts performed by someone who pretended to be a bishop, or a presbyter, are attested to by accompanying miracles and accepted as valid as if they had been performed by a duly ordained person.<sup>71</sup>

The story may betray more life during the earliest Islamic period of the *Rashidūn* (632–649), or of the earliest Umayyad caliphate (649–750). The town (a *dār Islām*) is administered by an emir with full authority over his subjects. The emir, who has a “councillor” (possibly a Christian) as his advisor, acts as an arbitrator between Christians and Jews. The Christians prevail over the Jews. The context is supported by hagiological sources contemporary to the earliest Islamic period. In the *Acta* of St. Anastasios the Persian (d. 628) the ruler of the Saracens assists the Christians to recover and translate the relics of the saint to Tyre and eventually to Jerusalem.<sup>72</sup> The fact, however, that this story is defended as being part of the *Leimon*, makes the book an even more attractive source on earliest Byzantine-Muslim relations.

In conclusion, the *Leimon* presents Arabs as nomads, tent dwellers, some of them hunters and others as caravan drivers. The latter are presented as merchants or transporters of wheat to Jerusalem; thence familiar with Palestine and the Jordan region, the habitat par excellence of many ascetics and monks. Their distinct clothing makes them different in appearance from Christians and Jews. They were notorious in attacking monks, robbing them,

70 Baynes “The ‘Pratum Spirituale’”, p. 407, n. (1). See also above, n. 15.

71 Cf. e.g. chapters 25 (*PG* 87.3: 2869D–2872A), 176 (3044B–3045D), 196 (3080D–3084A).

72 Cf. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse* 5, pp. 103–5.

or taking them captives for money rather than for ideological reasons, or religious hatred. They used some of their captives as slaves, or (rarely) as sacrificial offerings. Knowing of the puritan moral sensitivities of the monks, Saracens availed themselves as tempters. Generally speaking, monks were treated badly in the hands of the Saracens, some of them being beheaded and their monasteries burned. On a positive side, Saracens were often impressed by the humility, benevolence and miraculous powers of monks, converted themselves to Christianity and even became monks, or disciples and servants (ὑποτακτικοί) of such elders. Monks also are presented as being amazed at the conversion of men of such brutality. The *Leimon*, being what it is, a collection of stories of bravery, courage, sacrifices, and martyrdom, presents the Saracen Arabs particularly violent and driven by the vice of avarice. Such a conduct must have been explained by the monks as the outcome of paganism, or religious barbarism, and contrasted to their own monastic ideal of frugality, charity, benevolence and humility.

Another conclusion which can be drawn is that, with such a perception of the Saracens and given the fact that the earliest accounts which were composed by people from the monastic community and from this part of the empire and which influenced the image of Islam, earliest contacts of the Byzantines and any effort to understand Islam were doomed to fail; the preponderant perception of Islam was that which John of Damascus (ca.655–ca. 749) articulated in his *De Haeresibus*: “the deceptive religion [or superstition] of the Ishmaelites”, or Saracens.<sup>73</sup> From this point of view, the study of the *Leimon*, albeit incomplete, is fundamental for the understanding of the background of the Byzantine-Muslim relations.

Those first observers of Islam, who were all ascetics and monks, may have been unaware of its Judaeo-Christian affinities. Most importantly, however, in the midst of frightened impressions, they failed to discover the inherent admiration for the monastic ethos and spirituality upon which earliest Islam was founded. On the other hand, and from the point of view of Islam, the description of the monks in the *Leimon* of the Saracen Arabs underlines the historical and radical change which Islam brought about in the attitude of the same people as Muslims toward monks; an attitude of honour which the Qur’ān proclaimed, and Muhammad the Prophet upheld.

73 “Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἡ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν κρατούσα λαοπλανῆς θρησκεία τῶν Ἰσμηλιτῶν πρόδρομος οὖσα τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου”. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. iv, ed. Bonifatius Kotter (Berlin, 1981), p. 60. Cf. also Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972), in passim.

## Why Did Heraclius Not Defend Jerusalem, and Fight the Arabs?

Sophronius I (ca. 560–11 March 638), identified with Sophronius the “Sophist” (although the argument has not yet been convincingly stated),<sup>1</sup> ascended the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem in the year 634. At the age of seventy four, or closely, he was certainly neither seeking nor campaigning for the post! In fact in his own *Synodical Letter* which he sent canonically to Sergius I, Patriarch of Constantinople (610–638) and to his patriarchal synod on his ascension to the throne,<sup>2</sup> Sophronius conveys his greetings, expresses humility and laments extensively and passionately the fact that he was “forced physically” (“τῶν χειρὶ με βιασαμένων”) by the clergy, the monks, and the laity of his Church to leave his peaceful monastic life and exchange it for the troubles and responsibilities of the highest ecclesiastical office.<sup>3</sup> In this most lively and profoundly theological document Sophronius articulates eloquently the confession of faith of the Church of Jerusalem and of his own,<sup>4</sup> specifically on the Trinity, Logos theology, anthropology, eschatology, tradition of the Church, namely the Councils,<sup>5</sup>

1 *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York, 1991), p. 1928. On Sophronius see the authoritative monograph by Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, (Paris, 1972).

2 PG 87.3: 3148A–3200C. Since the publication of this articles a study and translation of this text has been published by Pauline Allen (Ed. and transl.), *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy. The Synodical Letter and other Documents* (Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford University Press, 2009).

3 “Βαβαί! βαβαί! Παμμακάριστοι, πῶς μοι φίλον νῦν τὸ ἡσύχιον, καὶ πολὺ τοῦ πρὶν προσφιλέστερον, ἂφ’ οὐπερ ἐξ ἡσυχίας ἀπράγμονος εἰς πραγμάτων τύρβην ἐλήλυθα, καὶ χερσαίας τισὶ κατατλούμαι τοῖς κύμασι!... Ἐπεὶ οὖν ταῦτα καὶ τούτων πέρα, σοφώτατοι, εἰς ἐμέ τὸν τρισάθλιον ἀνάγκη μεγάλη καὶ βία θεοφιλῶν κληρικῶν, καὶ εὐλαβῶν μοναχῶν, καὶ πιστῶν λαϊκῶν, τῶν πάντων πολιτῶν τῆς ἁγίας Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν πόλεως, τῶν χειρὶ με βιασαμένων, καὶ τυραννίδι δρασάντων γεγένηται, οἷος οὐκ οἶδα οὐδὲ ἐπίσταμαι κρίμασιν ...” 3148A ... 3149B.

4 3152C–3160B.

5 3160C–3189B. Sophronius seems to be making a distinction between the first four “great, most venerable and sacred” councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (541), which the Church of Jerusalem accepts as ecumenical, and the second Council in Constantinople (553) which he personally accepts with the same honour: “Τέτταρας τοῖνυν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐνθῆων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δογματῶν μεγάλας καὶ ἱεράς οἰκουμενικάς συνόδους δεχόμεθα ... Ἐπὶ ταύτας δὲ ταῖς μεγάλαις καὶ οἰκουμενικαῖς πανσέπτοις τε καὶ πανιέροις τῶν ἁγίων καὶ μακαρίων Πατέρων ὁμοτίμοις ἀθροίσεισι τέσσαρσι, καὶ πέμπτην ἁγίαν ἄλλην παρὰ ταύτας καὶ μετὰ ταύτας συστάσας, οἰκουμενικὴν δέχομαι σύνοδον, τὴν ἐν τῇ βασιλίδι καὶ αὐτῇ γενομένην τῶν πόλεων, Ἰουστινιανοῦ τοῦ τότε τὰ σκήπτρα τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς βασιλείας διέποντος ... 3184C, 3189C.

and he formulates a series of anathemas against heresiarchs and heresies.<sup>6</sup> In his conclusion Sophronius asks for the prayers and support of his fellow bishops,<sup>7</sup> and he pleads with them to pray for *their* emperor so that he may have a long life and victories against the “Barbarians”, especially the Saracens!<sup>8</sup>

These were turbulent times, theologically and politically, for the Church as a whole and for the city of Jerusalem. Sophronius, a staunch Chalcedonian and a perceptive theologian knew that behind the supposedly compromising doctrine of Monothelitism, embraced by Emperor Heraclius and most bishops, there was Monophysitism in disguise. While still a monk, he undertook a journey to Constantinople in an effort to convince Patriarch Sergius, a Syrian by birth and allegedly the son of Jacobite-Monophysite parents,<sup>9</sup> of the heretical nature of the monothelite theology, albeit in vain. He was still in Constantinople when Patriarch Modestos of Jerusalem (632–634) died, and Sophronius was called to become Patriarch.

On the political front the rise of Islam and the expansion of the Arabs outside the deserts of Arabia excited the Bedouin nomadic tribes in the Syro-Palestinian region to revolt against the Byzantines.<sup>10</sup> The upheaval of the Saracen tribes,<sup>11</sup> inflamed by the enthusiasm of the newly found identity had, in the words of Sophronius, “developed into a great hurricane which was forecasting disaster”.<sup>12</sup> In his *Synodical Letter* Sophronius asks the Patriarch of

6 3189C–3196D.

7 3196D–3200C.

8 Cf. quotation below, n. 13.

9 “Σέργιος γάρ, ἅπε Συρογενῆς καὶ γονέων Ἰακωβιτῶν ὑπάρχων, μίαν φυσικὴν θέλησιν καὶ μίαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν Χριστῷ ὡμολόγησε καὶ ἔγραψεν”. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, vol. 1 (Lipsiae: 1883; 1963), pp. 229–30. English translation, *The Chronicle of Theophanes. An English translation of anni mundi 6095–6305 (AD 602–813), with introduction and notes*, by Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia, 1982).

10 On the rise of Islam and the early Muslim conquests, see Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981); Walter E. Kaegi Jr., *Byzantium and the early Islamic conquests* (Cambridge, 1992); Felix-Marie Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion arabe*. 2 tom. *Tom II De la guerre juive à l’invasion Arabe* (1952); Marius Canard, *L’expansion arabo-islamique et ses répercussions* (London, 1974); D.J. Constantelos, “The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries” *Byzantion* 42 (1972), pp. 326–357; Donald R. Hill, *The termination of hostilities in the early Arab conquests, AD 634–656* (London, 1971); Hugh Kennedy, “Change and Continuity in Syria and Palestine at the time of the Moslem Conquests” *ARAM Periodical*, 1:2 (1989), pp. 258–267.

11 On the name *Saracens*, its meaning and treatment in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature see, Daniel J. Sahas, “*Saracens* and the Syrians in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature and before”, under publication in the *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*. See Chapter 12 in this volume.

12 “Καὶ πολὺν ὀρῶ συνεξευγμένον τὸν κλύδωνα, καὶ τῷ κλύδωνι παρομαρτοῦντα τὸν κίνδυνον”, 3148A.

Constantinople and his Bishops to pray for the kings that God may give them a long life and victories against the “Barbarians”, especially the Saracens:

Τὴν ἴσην δὲ ὑμῖν πλουσίαν προσάγω παράκλησιν, ἵνα ἐκτενή ποιήσθε καὶ ἄπαυστον τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν ἰκετεῖαν καὶ δέησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν φιλοχρίστων καὶ γαληνοτάτων ἡμῶν βασιλείων, τῶν θεόθεν τῆς βασιλείας λαχόντων τοὺς οἰάκας, ὅπως αὐτὸς ὁ φιλοικτίρμων Θεὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος, ὁ καὶ δύναμιν ἔχων ἰσοσθενῆ τῷ βουλήματι, ὑμετέραις θεοδέτοις εὐχαῖς μειλιχτιόμενος, ἐτῶν μὲν πληθύν αὐτοῖς πολλὴν προσχαρίσσηται, νίκας τε μεγίστας κατὰ βαρβάρων δόιη καὶ τροπια, καὶ παίδων παισὶν αὐτοῦ στεφανώσσει καὶ εἰρήνην θεϊκὴν χαρακώσσει, καὶ σκῆπτρα παράσχοι κραταῖα καὶ ἐνδύναμα, βαρβάρων μὲν ἀπάντων, μάλιστα δὲ Σαρακηνῶν, ὄφρυν καταθράττοντα, τῶν δι’ ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἀδοκῆτως νῦν ἡμῖν ἐπαναστάντων καὶ πάντα ληϊζομένων ὡμῶ καὶ θηριώδει φρονήματι, καὶ δυσσεβεῖ καὶ ἀθέῳ τολμήματι.<sup>13</sup>

This is a direct and passionate plea for imperial intervention. In a strange way, Sophronius wrote to the bishops of Constantinople about Heraclius, son of the exarch of Carthage (born ca. 575–d. in Constantinople Feb. 641),<sup>14</sup> as “their [ὑμῶν= your] kings”,<sup>15</sup> although in the same sentence he made reference to the kings of *our kingdom* for whom he wished that they may live in peace and be prosperous.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore Sophronius expressed the wish that Heraclius may subdue the Saracen threat immediately (θάττον), as he did before (“καθὰ τὸ πρότερον”), obviously with the Persians.<sup>17</sup> By doing so Sophronius was actually

13 “I implore you with the same fervour, to supplicate and pray to God, extensively and ceaselessly, for our Christ-loving and most gentle kings, who have been allotted the rudders of governing from God, that God the compassionate and man-loving one, who has power equal to His will, appeased by your God-receptive prayers, may grant to them many years, give them great victories and trophies against the barbarians, crown the children of their children with wreaths, fortify them with divine peace, and provide them with a strong and mighty staff, that may smash the pride [lit. the eyebrow] of all barbarians, especially that of the Saracens who, because of our sins, have unexpectedly revolted now against us, plundering everything with a crude and beastly disposition, irreverent and ungodly daring” 3197C–D. Cf. also Allen, (2.7.3.), pp. 152–154.

14 Became emperor on October 5, 610 a 575–d. in Constantinople Feb. 641) became emperor on October 5, 610 after he overthrew the “tyrannical” Phocas at the end of a ruthless civil war (608–610).

15 “... τοῖς θεοσδότοις ὑμῶν βασιλεῦσι δωρήσοιτο”, according to the *PG* edition, 3200A. This, however, may be a textual flaw, as Allen’s edition has it “ἡμῶν (= our kings), see, p. 154. In 3197C the text quoted above in n. 13 has it “ἡμῶν [our] βασιλείων”. See also nn. 16, 17.

16 “ἵνα εὐημεροῖεν μὲν αὐτοὶ οἱ τὸ ἐπὶ γῆς ἡμῶν βασιλῆιον ἔχοντες ...” 3200A.

17 “καταβάλλοι θάττον αὐτῶν τὰ μανίας πλήρη φρυάγματα, καὶ εὐτελεῖς αὐτοῦς ὑποπόδιον, καθὰ τὸ πρότερον, τοῖς θεοσδότοις ἡμῶν [the *PG* has it ὑμῶν] βασιλεῦσι δωρήσοιτο”, 3197D–3200A.

inviting Heraclius to undertake a crusade personally to rescue Jerusalem. Born in *ca.* 560, Sophronius had known Heraclius as a crusader, and he was close to the times when the traumatic civil war against the “tyrannical” Phocas (610), and even closer to home when the six-year wars (618–624) and the exhilarating victory over the Persians and the recovery of the cross of Christ were taking place. He probably knew also that, unlike his predecessor Maurice (582–602), Heraclius commanded his army in person.<sup>18</sup>

Heraclius did not respond to Sophronius’ plea. One may hypothesise that the exact message did not reach the emperor or, if it did, might not have alarmed the far away residing Constantinopolitan bishops and the emperor who might not have sufficiently appreciated the danger veiled behind a rather obscure and pietistic sentence that the Saracens “... because of our sins, have unexpectedly revolted now against us, plundering everything with a crude and beastly disposition, irreverent and ungodly daring”.<sup>19</sup> The particular wording implies tribesmen living in the midst of, or in close proximity to, Christians who now have revolted against their neighbours; this is not a message of an invasion from an outside force. This “revolt..., irreverent and ungodly daring” being a punishment of God for the sins of the Christians, as the ascetic and elderly ecclesiastic put it, did not necessarily carry the meaning of the prospect of a permanent occupation to the officials of the imperial court. What were the sins of the Christians for which God was arousing the Saracens against them? To consider that Sophronius implies here the heresy of Monothelitism, is not improbable; and for the monothelite Patriarch and the emperor this was neither a heresy nor a sin! One could also surmise that, since these Saracen incursions came, according to Sophronius himself who writes in early 634, “unexpectedly” (ἀδοκῆτως), Heraclius might have thought of Sophronius’ alarm as premature, not threatening to the empire. In such a context the plea could not, perhaps, have the chance to be taken seriously. The Saracen uprising,

18 Cf. Romily Jenkins, *Byzantium. The Imperial Centuries AD 610–1071* (London, 1966), p. 16. Chapter two on “Heraclius” (pp. 15–29) is an incisive profile of the emperor.

19 In a sermon of his on Epiphany (6 January 635) Sophronius raises the rhetorical question, “Why do wars happen to us? Why do barbarian assaults are multiplying? Why do Saracen troops rise against us?” To this he gives his own answer that this is because of the sins of the Christians, who have deviated from the faith and conduct which God has willed for them. Text in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, vol. v. (Brussels, 1963 [1888]), pp. 151–168. Schönborn sees a difference in the tone of anxiety of Sophronius regarding the Arab invasions between that exhumed in his Synodical Letters, where there seems still to be hope that the emperor may triumph over the Arabs, and the pessimism expressed in the Epiphany sermon. In such a difference Schönborn bases his suggestion that Sophronius was elected Patriarch in the earliest days of 634. *Sophrone*, pp. 90–1.

as Sophronius is referring to, sounds like familiar nomadic expeditions (*razzias*) aimed at plundering villages rather than conquering and occupying cities and land permanently. Indeed, the textual evidence makes the Saracens in earlier times plunderers of villages of Syria and Palestine. Thus Theophanes informs us that in the early years of Justinian's reign (527–565) the Saracens launched an expedition against Antioch, Palestine and Syria, although in this instance this expedition forced the emperor to defend the villages against “the barbarian Saracen”!<sup>20</sup> Further south in the Sinai the Saracens posed a threat to the monastery and the local population, something which, on the testimony of Procopius, prompted the emperor to build, at the request of the monks, a fortification around their church dedicated to the Theotokos.<sup>21</sup> The *Leimon*<sup>22</sup> of the Cilician born monk and writer John Moschus (d. in Rome 634) speaks of Saracens living near the Dead Sea, dressed like Jews,<sup>23</sup> and attacking passers-by. In one instance Saracens attack an anchorite and behead him.<sup>24</sup> In the early part of the seventh-century, when the walls of two alliances (of the Persians with the North and North-eastern Arabian tribes, the Lakhmids, and of the Byzantines with the North-western Arabian tribes, the Ghassānids)

20 “... ἐπέτριψεν Ἀλαμούνδαρος ὁ Ζεκικῆς, ὁ βασιλίσκος τῶν Σαρακηνῶν, καὶ ἐπραΐδευσε τὴν πρῶτην Συρίαν ἕως τῶν ὀρίων Ἀντιοχείας ... καὶ ἐφόνευσε πολλοὺς καὶ ἔκαυσε τὰ ἔξω Χαλκηδόνος καὶ τὸ Σέρμιον κτῆμα καὶ τὴν Κυνηγίαν χώραν”. *Chronographia*, p.178, 8–12. One can detect Theophanes’ despise for the Saracens and for al-Mundir in particular in his belittling him as “ὁ βασιλίσκος τῶν Σαρακηνῶν” (“the little [or, fake] king of the Saracens”).

21 “ἐς δὲ τοῦ ὄρους τὸν πρόποδα καὶ φρούριον ἐχυρώτατον [ὄχυρώτατον?] ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος ὠκοδομήσατο, ὡς μὴ ἐνθένδε Σαρακηνοὶ βάρβαροι ἔρχοιεν ἄτε τῆς χώρας ἐρήμου οὐσης ... ἐσβάλλειν ὡς λαθραϊότατα ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ Παλαιστίνης χωρία. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τῆδε πεποιήται”. Procopius, *On the Buildings*, v 9, 9; ed. Veh, *Prokop Bauten*, p. 276. For Procopius the Saracens are adversarial (“... Σαρακηνοὶς τοῖς πολεμίοις”, II 6, 15 and II 11, 10), invaders (“ὄσον τοὺς ἐκείνη [Σεργιούπολιν] Σαρακηνοὺς ἀποκρούεσθαι ὅσον τε εἶναι ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς αὐτὸ ἐξελεῖν”, II 9, 3 and II 11, 12) and, by inference, living as nomads rather than as city dwellers, unable to storm walled cities (“ἀδύνατοι γὰρ τειχομαχεῖν εἰσὶ Σαρακηνοὶ φύσει”, II 9, 4).

22 Or *Pratum Spirituale*, PG 87.3, 2852A–3112B. French translation by M.J. Rouët de Journel, *Le Pré Spirituel* (Paris, 1946, 2nd ed. 1960); Italian translation by R. Maisano, *Il Prato* (Naples, 1982); John Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschus* (Kalamazoo, MI 1992). For a detailed study of the ms editions and translations of the *Leimon*, see Henry Chadwick “John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist” in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982, # XVIII). See also N.H. Baynes, “The ‘Pratum spirituale’”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 13 (1974), pp. 404–14. Th. Nissen has published additional stories not found in Migne’s edition. “Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1938), pp. 351–376.

23 A Council at the Lateran equated Saracens and Jews, at least in the dress: “Περὶ φίγξεως σχήματος Χριστιανῶν, Ἰουδαίων καὶ Σαρακηνῶν.” Ἐν τισιν ἐπαρχίαις παρὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἢ Σαρακηνοὺς ἢ τῶν ἐνδυμάτων διαστέλλει διαφορά. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔν τισιν οὕτως τις ἐπήυξησεν σύγχυσις, ὡς μηδεμίαν διαφορὰν διαιρήσεται ...” PG 87: 2868C.

24 *Leimon*, Cap. xx, PG 87.3:2868A–B.



gave way to pressures from the outside and from within of each own confines, the power of the nomadic groups was unleashed. They indulged in destructive raids against settlements in the area of Jordan and even near the walls of Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> The Saracen raids, many of them directed against the monasteries of Judaea, including the lavra of Mar Sabbas, had been destructive enough to have alarmed the population of Palestine. Heraclius ought to have been aware of the Arab threat in general. Two major battles between the Byzantines and the Arabs, one at Dāthin near Gaza (4 February, 634) and another at Ajnadayn near Lydda (30 July, 634) had resulted in Byzantine defeat. In the latter Heraclius' own brother, Theodore, had fallen and his army had been dispersed. These two defeats may have convinced Heraclius that to undertake an expedition against the unruly and undisciplined forces of the Arabs was too risky and, therefore, one may want to suggest that his reasons for not responding to Sophronius' plea were purely military. A few months later, on Christmas Day, 634 which happened to fall on a Sunday, Sophronius delivered a sermon at the Church of the Theotokos in Jerusalem,<sup>26</sup> lamenting the fact that because of "the disorder of the Saracens and their destructive revolt", himself and the Christians could not celebrate Christmas at the birthplace of Christ. Jerusalem was to be the next.<sup>27</sup> The siege of Jerusalem itself started during the third phase of the Arab conquests<sup>28</sup> under Abū 'Ubayda, supported by a number of able commanders, conquerors of Syrian cities, such as Yazid b. Abi Sufyān, Mu'ādh b. Jabal, Khālid b. al-Walīd, and 'Amr b. al-Ās. Inside the walls Sophronius was defending the city, trying to keep the spirit of the people alive and hoping for assistance from Constantinople. Abū 'Ubayda proposed a choice among three terms: conversion to Islam, capitulation and paying of taxes, or destruction of the city. Conversion to Islam was beyond consideration. Also, the experience

25 Donner, *Conquests*, 48. Cf. also Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 300, Turtledove, p. 11; and D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the study of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 156–7.

26 Ed. Herman Usener, in *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* (Frankfurt a. M.), 41 (1886) 501–515; reprinted by Ioannes Phokylides, in *Ἑκκλησιαστικὸς Φάρος* (Alexandria) 17 (1918), pp. 369–370; text pp. 371–386. Latin and incomplete translation, in *PG* 87,3: 3201–3212.

27 Shlomo D. Goitein ["Jerusalem in the Arab period (638–1099)"], *The Jerusalem Cathedral* 2 (1982), pp. 168–196, at 170] maintains that "Gaza was the first objective in the war of conquest" and that "Jerusalem was remote from Arab conquest". His assertion is based on the assumption that "The Arab invaders did not move against Jerusalem initially, for in desert conquest Bedouin generally seek to conquer areas they frequent for purposes of *trade or accompanying convoys*". *Ibid.* Emphasis is ours. However, Jerusalem had been known to the Arabs and Islam had associated itself with it from its earliest moments. Whether the siege itself lasted for a long period of time, or it was only a short one which took place just before 638, is still under debate. The sources seem to point to a lengthy surrounding of the vicinity and to a rather short siege of the city itself.

28 Donner, *Conquests*, pp. 151–2.

of the destruction of the city by the Persians twenty five years earlier made fighting against the Arabs and risking destruction of the holy places equally unacceptable. Sophronius, finally, chose capitulation, but only to ‘Umar personally.<sup>29</sup> By capitulating Jerusalem to the Arabs, Sophronius was not simply protecting the city physically; he was also keeping it from becoming a Jewish city! If Sophronius was interested only in the temporary physical protection of the city, he could have delivered it to ‘Umar’s deputy. Capitulation and paying of taxes was not seen as a treasonous act. Damascus was capitulated in 636 by the bishop, or an “abbott”, and the grandfather of John of Damascus, Mansūr ibn Sargūn.<sup>30</sup> Three years after Jerusalem, in 641, the Patriarch of Alexandria did exactly the same. Capitulation of a city did not guarantee absolute safety for the people, especially for those who offered resistance and chose martyrdom. In fact the capitulation of Jerusalem is connected with the martyrdom of ten men who were decapitated in front of the walls of the city, whose relics Sophronius placed in the martyrion of St. Stephen the protomartyr!<sup>31</sup> The Muslim invasions revived the cult of saints and martyrs with a new wave of “neomartyrs”.

Why then, even when ‘Amr’s troops were at the door of Jerusalem, and Abū ‘Ubayda was defining the terms of surrender, did Heraclius not respond? The answers which have been given (some of them hinted to above) are mostly military: Heraclius was already over sixty years of age (he was born in *ca.* 575), tired of wars, and ill.<sup>32</sup> His army had already been defeated by the Arabs, although the final defeat at Yarmuk and his bidding farewell to Syria were still to come (20 August, 636). By Heraclius’ time, and because of his own policies, the empire could no longer afford the large network of garrisons which once had maintained. This process of thinning out such defences had begun from the sixth century, with the exception of those at the border with Persia;<sup>33</sup> Heraclius, therefore, would not have wanted to be tied with long-term military commitments to Palestine and Syria. He also might have reconciled with the idea that Jerusalem was a lost cause and that the aged and theologically

29 See, Daniel J. Sahas, “Patriarch Sophronius, ‘Umar and the capitulation of Jerusalem” (Arabic translation in, *Al-sirā al-islāmī al-faranjī ‘alā Filastīn fī al-qurūn al-wustā*, edited by Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Burhan Dajani (Beirut, 1994), pp. 53–71. *Idem*, “The Covenant of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb with the Christians of Jerusalem” (in Arabic), in same as above, pp. 71–77. See Chapters 9 and 10 in this volume.

30 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “heresy of the Ishmaelites* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 17 ff, where references especially to al-Baladhūri’s *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*.

31 Cf. F.-M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion Arabe* (Paris, 1952), p. 404.

32 According to Kaegi (*Byzantium*, p. 63) in the 630s Heraclius continued to be energetic and his illness had not incapacitated him.

33 Cf. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p. 51.

uncompromising Patriarch was a small guarantee that he would be able to keep the city peaceful and the situation stable, even if himself were able to halt the Muslim advances momentarily. Also Heraclius' military base had been Antioch, closer to his native Armenia, while Jerusalem was not a strategic post and no previous emperor had used it as such. The condition of the Byzantine military forces at the time of the rise of Islam was also a factor for Heraclius, especially the restlessness of the troops coming from the East, bringing along their readiness to mutiny when they came to defend Syria and Palestine.<sup>34</sup> Although the only reigning Byzantine emperor to have visited Jerusalem (and that only when he reinstated the cross of Christ which he recovered from the Persians),<sup>35</sup> and in spite of his reverence for the city, Heraclius might have considered – and rightly so – that the Muslims would not harm the Christians and the city as the Persians had done.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Heraclius might have underestimated the actual danger in which Jerusalem was, and the repercussions which its fall would have caused on the rest of the Eastern provinces.

These military considerations notwithstanding, there seems to be another set of considerations, the theological and doctrinal ones, coupled with those of personality conflict between the two protagonists. On account of some explicit and implicit evidence on these considerations, we may not want to disregard them as irrelevant. Taking the clue from Theophanes, the least that one can suggest is that Heraclius had been previously embarrassed by Sophronius' anti-Monothelite campaign, in which the traditionalist mystic had exposed Monothelitism as a heresy, and he was now agitated by the Patriarch's *Synodical Letters* which insisted on its condemnation. Writes Theophanes:

ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα Ἡράκλειος ἡσχύνθη, καὶ καταλύσαι μὲν τὰ οἰκεία οὐκ ἠθέλησεν, καὶ πάλιν τὸν ὀνειδισμόν οὐχ ὑπέφερεν.

(When Heraclius heard about these,<sup>37</sup> he felt ashamed, because on the one hand he did not want to dissolve his own creations, but on the other he could not stand the reproach either.)<sup>38</sup>

34 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

36 Archaeological evidence shows that the Persians, although Zoroastrians, did not systematically destroy Christian churches or prevent the Christians from worshipping in them in the areas which they controlled, particularly in Palestine and Syria; and this in contrast to the destruction they caused in Asia Minor. Cf. Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p. 45.

37 The context of the passage allows us to safely interpret this "these" as being the election of Sophronius as Patriarch, the convention of a council which condemned the Monothelite doctrine, and the Synodical Letter which the new Patriarch sent to Sergius of Constantinople.

38 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 330, 19–21.

The personality of Heraclius is multifaceted and undetermined. It can be said that, if Heraclius was an able general, he was a rather weak administrator and an even weaker, if not ignorant, theologian. Heraclius' military abilities and successes, in relation to the Syro-Palestinian context and aspirations, may need to be modified and possibly revised.<sup>39</sup> When he arrived in Constantinople in 610 to overthrow the "tyrannical" Phocas,<sup>40</sup> he found the Slavs and the Avars invading the northern Balkans, the Persians exerting pressure on the eastern frontier,<sup>41</sup> and pockets of Phocas' sympathizers resisting him in Ankyra and Antioch.<sup>42</sup> Given the bitterness of the civil war (608–610) and his personal hatred for Phocas, one can assume that Heraclius was feeling betrayed by the Syrians for having harboured the Phocas' sympathizers who resisted him. Asia Minor and Syria were areas in which Heraclius experienced disasters early on, like the rebellion of Komentiolos, Phocas' nephew (610–611), and his own defeat by the Persians in 611. After the conquest of Caesarea of Cappadocia (612?) during which the Persians took many thousands of captives,<sup>43</sup> the Persians captured Damascus. Heraclius proposed truce in exchange of paying taxes; an offer which the Persians refused. In 616 they captured Jordan, Palestine and Jerusalem, abducted Patriarch Zachariah and the cross of Christ and took them both to Persia. The Persian victories extended to Egypt, Alexandria and Libya, all the way to Ethiopia.

39 Jenkins' evaluation of Heraclius is not at all complimentary! His fame both as a ruler and as a soldier was deeply, and very justly, venerated for centuries in Byzantine memory by others, while for Jenkins "... his reputation as a statesman and a soldier is ludicrously exaggerated". Jenkins, *Byzantium*, p. 22.

40 Phocas was executed on October 5, 610 in Constantinople. Heraclius was crowned emperor by Sergius in the palace church of St. Stephen. On the same day Eudokia, his fiancée, was crowned empress and he and her were married! On July 7 (611?) Epiphania, their daughter, was born. On August 15 she was baptized at Vlachernae by Patriarch Sergius. On May 3 (612?) Heraclius the Young, their son, was born, named also Constantine. In the same year (612?), August 14, Eudokia died. On October 4 Heraclius' daughter Epiphania was crowned empress by Sergius and on December 25 his son Heraclius the Young. In 613/4 Heraclius married Martina who was crowned empress by Sergius. Theophanes' source for Heraclius' history is George of Pisidia (Cf. *Chronographia*, p. 298, 18), which W.E. Kaegi Jr. ["New Evidence on the Early Reign of Heraclius", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 66 (1973) 308–330] revisits on the basis of new evidence from the Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, edited by A.-J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore Saint de Sykéôn* (Brussels, 1970).

41 In the month of May (611) the Persians launched an attack against Syria, conquered Apameia and Edessa, and came up to Antioch. In the ensuing battle the Byzantines were defeated, "and all the troops of the Romans were lost so that very few escaped". Theophanes, *Chronographia*, pp. 299, 18.

42 Cf. Kaegi, "New Evidence", pp. 311ff.

43 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, pp. 299, 33–300, 3.

Heraclius's military victories do not seem to have been as decisive. He had to deal with both the Avars in Thrace and the Persians in the East. His peace treaty (attempted twice) with the Khagan of the Avars was humiliating; and this in order to deal with the Persians. The message with which Theophanes leaves us is that Chosroes was not defeated by Heraclius directly, but by an internal revolt; he was overthrown by his general Seroes who imprisoned him, killed his son in front of him, called Closroes' opponents to humiliate him and then ordered his execution. It was then that Seroes sent a message to Heraclius asking him to sign a permanent peace agreement, freed all Christian prisoners, including Patriarch Zachariah, and returned to Heraclius the cross of Christ.<sup>44</sup> It was also a year later (629) that Heraclius travelled to Jerusalem to reinstate it.<sup>45</sup> This event established Heraclius' reputation as a successful military man. From the point of view of the Christian Arabs of Syria and Palestine, this happy outcome was part of the long standing conflicts between the two empires;<sup>46</sup> not necessarily a test or a warranty of Byzantine victory over the Saracens and the Muslim Arabs who were spreading out rapidly from the deep South. The fact that Heraclius used to command the army in person has been used as evidence of the emperor's military ability, although this style may speak more of his crusader mentality.<sup>47</sup> This style resulted in significant victories; but against the Persians, not against the Arabs. Kaegi has aptly suggested that, Heraclius' "travel in the [Syro-Palestinian] region would have alerted him to the importance of the Christian Arabs in providing security. In spite of everything, he failed to make efficient defensive preparations against the Muslims, whether by using friendly Christian Arab tribes or raising sufficient Byzantine troops from other areas".<sup>48</sup> But that may not have been the primary concern of Heraclius. Heraclius' principal concerns after departing Jerusalem in 630 were the reconstruction of ruined holy sites; settling of problems within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, namely Modestus episcopacy in Jerusalem; Jewish policy; and efforts to heal doctrinal Christological controversies, especially among Monophysites, his own fellow Armenians and the Jacobites. The first

44 Theophanes, pp. 326, 23–327, 16.

45 Theophanes, pp. 328, 2–10, 13–15.

46 Theophanes interprets the six-year war, after which he signed the seven-year peace with the Persians, typologically, or "mystically", in the manner of God who created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested! "... τῷ ζ' ἔτει εἰρηνεύσας μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης ἐπὶ Κωνσταντινούπολιν ὑπέστρεψεν μυστικῶν τινα θεωρίαν ἐν τούτῳ πληρώσας". *Ibid.*, pp. 327, 25–27; 327, 27–28.

47 Heraclius is depicted by Theophanes as a crusader, who leads his troops against the enemy (especially the Persians), encouraging and inciting them with religious words and fervour, and promising them eternal life. Cf. e.g. *Ibid.*, pp. 307, 2–13; 317, 17–21; 319, 23.

48 *Byzantium*, p. 76.

two indicate Heraclius' interest in Jerusalem, while the last two concern doctrinal matters.<sup>49</sup>

On matters of administration Heraclius remained personally detached. Characteristically, when in 622 he undertook the expedition against the Persians, he left behind to manage the affairs in Constantinople his own son, Heraclius junior, called also new Constantine, who at the time was barely ten years of age,<sup>50</sup> Patriarch Sergius, and the patrician Bonosus, a prudent, intelligent, and ready man. He even named as guardian of his son his former rival, the Avar Khagan, with whom he had just made peace!<sup>51</sup> Theophanes remarks, rather sarcastically, that Heraclius "*thought that*" he had concluded a peace accord with the Avars!<sup>52</sup> As to the *thematic* system which has been attributed to him, this must be credited actually to his predecessor, Emperor Maurice.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, Heraclius is depicted also as a vengeful person, who after his victory against Chosroes celebrates the holiday of the Epiphany (627),

καταστρέφων τὰ τοῦ Χοσρόου παλάτια κτίσματα ὑπέριμα ὄντα καὶ θαυμαστὰ καὶ καταπληκτικά, ἅπερ ἕως ἐδάφους καθεῖλεν, ἵνα μάθη Χοσρόης, οἷον πόνον εἶχον Ῥωμαῖοι τῶν πόλεων ἐρημουμένων παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ πυρπολουμένων.<sup>54</sup>

In the context of our theme, one may wonder whether this is not an aspect of Heraclius' personality which needs to be taken into account in respect of how, perhaps, Heraclius was feeling towards his critic, Sophronius. Thus, although Heraclius knew Palestine and Syria better than any emperor since the third century,<sup>55</sup> he seems not to have been in tune with two distinct characteristics of the region and its people, discontent already with the protracted Byzantino-Persian wars; namely, independent thinking politically, as well as doctrinally diverse and passionate.

49 In fact, immediately after his pilgrimage to Jerusalem he participated in two local church councils, one in Hierapolis/Mambij in N. Syria (631) and another in Theodosiopolis/Erzurum in Byzantine Armenia (between February 631 and February 632). *Ibid.*, p. 76.

50 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 300, 8–9.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 303, 3–8.

52 "... καὶ μετὰ τῶν Ἀβάρων εἰρηνεύσας, ὡς ἐνόμιζεν". *Ibid.*, p. 302, 28.

53 Jenkins, *Byzantium*, p. 16 ff.

54 "... destroying Chosroes's palaces, which were luxurious, marvellous and amazing buildings, which he cleared to the ground so that Chosroes may learn how the Romans were feeling [lit. what pain the Romans were feeling] when he was burning and making the cities desolate". Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 322, 19–21.

55 Kaegi, *Byzantium*, 76.

But let us take a few short steps back and look at Heraclius' profile in relationship to theology and doctrine. Our sources for this excursus are neither plentiful nor descriptive. The earliest one is the *History* in eight books by Theophylaktos Simocattes (the "snub-nosed cat") born towards the end of the 580s.<sup>56</sup> Born in Egypt in the sixth century, his early education was taken most likely in Alexandria. He moved to Constantinople at the time, or shortly after, the overthrow of Phocas. A civil servant and writer, he was legal advisor to Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople who, perhaps again, encouraged him to write the *History*. This is mainly a military, diplomatic and political, not a religious, history of the Roman Empire. The part of history which is his, and the main one, is the history of Emperor Maurice (582–602). For the previous period he borrowed from Procopius, Agathias and Menander Protector; thence the epithet attached to him, ἀντιγραφεύς (copyist). His information on Heraclius is scant. A better source may be Theophanes which, however, needs to be used with a considerable caution.

Not indifferent to doctrine, Heraclius was not able to understand the nuances of doctrine and resolve theological disputes, although he was daring in taking initiatives on such matters. For him to defend the Council of Chalcedon, which Constantinople had embraced, was a duty and a criterion of Orthodoxy; even if he was unable to understand the essential meaning and the implications of the theology of this Council, as his subsequent actions clearly prove.<sup>57</sup> On matters of religious life he appears to be pious and possibly superstitious. According to the *vita* of St. Theodore of Sykeon, when Heraclius granted grace to Domentziolos' life he asked for the saint's blessings and, according to the same *vita*, although he was in haste to meet the Persians, he personally visited the saint at Sykeon during Lent (613) en route to Antioch.<sup>58</sup> He was defeated!

56 Ed. C. de Boor, revised P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972). On Simocattes, see *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, pp. 1900–1.

57 His antipathy towards the Monophysites and anti-Chalcedonian Syrians was evident, and mutual, and his religious policies deadly for the empire. Cf. Joseph Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas, sa époque – sa vie – son œuvre* (Paris, 1950), p. 51. In Edessa he was refused Holy Communion by the metropolitan Isaiah for not anathematizing the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. In Mabboug, where the Chalcedonians predominated, he clashed with the citizens over the question of the one will of Christ. They were anti-Nestorian, but they adhered to the doctrine of the two wills in Christ. Heraclius pillaged the houses and the churches of those who did not profess Monothelitism and persecuted their priests and monks. Michael the Syrian, *History* XI, iv, 412–13. Michael, the Monophysite chronicler, sees these persecutions as a cause for the success of the Arabs. Under these circumstances, it would make, perhaps, little sense for Heraclius to fight actively against the Arabs.

58 Festugière, *Vie de Théodore Saint de Sykéon*, pp. 311 (chapter 152, lines 10–18), and 328.

The Persians took Antioch and overran Cicilia, including Tarsus. The *Vita* emphasises indirectly the influence of monks and holy men in Byzantium.<sup>59</sup>

Theophanes depicts Heraclius as having been tricked into Monothelitism by the Jacobite Patriarch Athanasius. On the advice of Sergius who was a Monothelite, Heraclius had already instructed Athanasius to accept the Council of Chalcedon and confess two conjoined natures and “one natural will and energy in Christ” on the promise that he would make him Patriarch of Antioch.<sup>60</sup> Athanasius agreed, but he raised to Heraclius the question about the energies and the wills (“... κινήσας πρὸς βασιλέα περι πίστεως λόγους ...”); an obviously slippery question for which Theophanes ascribed to Athanasius the rather unflattering epithets of “a cunning and wicked man, in the order of the natural knavery of the Syrians”!<sup>61</sup> Taken aback (“ξενοφοβηθείς”)<sup>62</sup> by this theological probing, Heraclius asked Sergius of Constantinople, his long-time protégé and ally. Sergius in turn, and possibly out of ignorance, asked Cyrus bishop of Fasis. Both then agreed that there is one will and one energy in Christ. Heraclius then wrote to Pope Honorius I (619–625) who was inclined towards the monothelite doctrine;<sup>63</sup> so was the Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyrus (630–643). When Cyrus succeeded George (621–630) to the patriarchal throne of Alexandria he signed an accord with the bishop of Pharan Theodore, affirming the one natural energy of Christ. Monothelite was also the Patriarch of Antioch Anastasius. Theophanes says nothing about the patriarchate of Jerusalem at

59 On the subject, see P. Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) 80–101; W.H.C. Frend, “The Monks and the Survival of the East Roman Empire in the Fifth Century”, *Past and Present* 54 (1972) 3–24.

60 Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, pp. 329, 21–330, 2.

61 “θεινὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ καχοῦργος τῆ τῶν Σύρων ἐμφύτῳ πανουργίᾳ”. *Ibid.*, 329, 22–23.

62 *Ibid.*, 329, 29.

63 Theophanes calls this pope John, which may not be an anachronism, as Turtledove has suggested (“Theophanes’ chronology is confused, as is often the case when he discusses events in the West”. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, p. 32, n. 70). Pope Honorius (d. 12.X.638) was a Monothelite. He was succeeded by Severinus, a Monothelite sympathizer, who served as pope only from May 28 to August 2, 640. His successor, Pope John IV became pope on Christmas Eve, or Christmas Day, 640 and reigned until 642. He convened a synod in January 641, which condemned Monothelitism and the Monothelite *Ekthesis* of Heraclius. Heraclius died on the 11th of February, 641. Although he was informing the pope of the faith of Sergius (610–638) and Anastasius of Antioch (620–628) (*Chronographia*, 330, 5–6), both of them being already dead at the time of John’s ascension to the throne of Rome, this fact does not exclude the possibility, as A.N. Stratos has maintained [*Byzantium in the Seventh Century II (634–641)* (Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 148–49], that Heraclius did indeed write to this pope, expose the events regarding the *Ekthesis* and Sergius’ compulsion on him, and renounce his Monothelite concession; even if no such letter has survived. Heraclius’ renunciation of Monothelitism in Anastasius Apocrisarius, on the testimony of Maximus the Confessor, in *PG* 90:125A–B.



this point. We must assume that Jerusalem and Patriarch Zacharias (609–632) were Chalcedonian. Sophronius' struggles against Monothelitism had forced Heraclius to issue an edict ("Ἐκθειςς), hated by the Orthodox, and much in the tradition of the *Henoticon* of the pro-Monophysite Emperor Zeno (474–91), declaring a moratorium on any further squabbling on either one or two natures or wills in Christ. This was a formula of faith, written by Patriarch Sergius, which in an effort to reconcile Chalcedonians and Monophysites was supporting Monothelitism.<sup>64</sup> Thus of the pentarchy, only Jerusalem was Chalcedonian orthodox; a sign of how un-suspecting were Sophronius' contemporary ecclesiastics of Monothelitism as a disguise for Monophysitism. In reality Heraclius' edict was imposing the emperor's will and Monothelitism by default.

This was the theological and psychological context when the seventy-four year old Sophronius ascended the throne of Jerusalem. At this point the Monothelite controversies had fragmented the East and alienated it from the West; so much so that Theophanes remarks that,

After events developed the one right after the other, the council of Chalcedon and the catholic Church fell into a great disrepute (ὄνειδος). For the Jacobites and the [Monophysite sect of the] Theodosians were boasting that, "it is not us with Chalcedon, but rather Chalcedon which came into communion with us, by having confessed, through the one energy, the one nature of Christ."<sup>65</sup>

Immediately after his election as Patriarch, Sophronius called a synod of bishops which anathematized the Monothelite doctrine. Subsequently to this he sent his canonical *Synodical Letter* to the synod of Constantinople in which he articulated the faith of the Church of Jerusalem, and anathematized all heresies including Monothelitism. There is no obvious sign of tension between Jerusalem and Constantinople in this *Letter*. On the contrary, Sophronius sounds respectful and very humble, showering his fellow bishops with such superlatives like, "most wise men", "blessed", "most blessed", "compassionate", "affectionate", "most holy", "all-holy", "a God-loving and joyous brotherhood";<sup>66</sup>

64 See, *Ekthesis*, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 683.

65 "τούτων δὲ οὕτω παρακολουθησάντων, εἰς μέγα ὄνειδος ἡ σύνοδος Χαλκηδόνος καὶ ἡ καθολικὴ περιέπεσεν ἐκκλησία. κατεκαυχῶντο γὰρ οἱ Ἰακωβίται καὶ οἱ Θεοδοσιανοὶ φάσκοντες, ὅτι 'οὐχ ἡμεῖς τῇ Χαλκηδόνι, ἀλλ' ἡ Χαλκηδὼν μάλλον ἡμῖν ἐκοινώνησεν, διὰ τῆς μίας ἐνεργείας μίαν ὁμολογήσασα φύσιν Χριστοῦ". *Chronographia*, p. 330, 11–15.

66 "σοφώτατοι", 3149B, 3184C; "μακάριοι" 3152C; "μακαριώτατοι", συμπαθεῖς, φιλόστοργοι" ("... μαρτυρήσῃ δὲ τοῖς μακαριωτάτοις ὑμῖν τὸ συμπαθὲς καὶ φιλόστοργον..." 3196D); "θειότατοι", 3160C; "πανιέρους", 3200C; "θεοφιλή καὶ φαιδρὰν ἀδελφότητα" 3200C.

asking them for their guidance, teaching, and brotherly support in the pursue of his pastoral duties,<sup>67</sup> and assuring them of his own love, which they will experience “if they (you) discover the spiritual fervour which is in his (my) heart”.<sup>68</sup> Most likely the Constantinopolitan bishops must have read this “spiritual fervour” to mean passion of a stubborn zealot!

Theophanes’ narrative at this point with reference to Heraclius, is revealing. He writes:

When he heard these (ταῦτα), Heraclius was ashamed. He did not want to dissolve his own creations, but could not stand any disrepute (ὄνειδισμόν, lit. shame) either. Thinking that he was doing something great, he then promulgated the so-called Edict which said that one should not [is not allowed to] confess either one or two energies in Christ ...<sup>69</sup>

One may wonder whether Heraclius would have ever felt embarrassed for the “disrepute” of the Church and would have ever issued this edict, had Sophronius not treated Monothelism as heresy and exposed Heraclius’ “own creations”! We must assume also that Heraclius’ embarrassment may not have been merely theological or doctrinal, but personal as well. The commotion which the Monoenergetic/Monothelite debate had created, gave the opportunity to the anti-Chalcedonian forces, especially among the populace, to ridicule their opponents. As in a previous case, Theophanes says that the anti-Chalcedonians and staunch opponents of Heraclius were dragging the reputation of the Church to the taverns and bathhouses (graphic details which may help us to understand the nature of Heraclius’ embarrassment) mocking the Chalcedonians that, “the formerly pro-Nestorians, have now been awakened and returned to the truth, by being united with us on the [issue of the] one nature of Christ, through the one energy”.<sup>70</sup> Such ridicule must have, certainly, tarnished the reputation of an emperor otherwise victorious in the battlefield; and the finger which had turned the spotlight on him was Sophronius! I do

67 “Ἐπεὶ οὖν ταῦτα καὶ τούτων πέρα, σοφώτατοι, ... ἀξιώ τοὺς πανιέρους ὑμᾶς καὶ προτρέπομαι, μὴ μόνον εὐχαῖς καθαραῖς τοῖς πρὸς Κύριον ἐπικουρεῖν ἐμοί ...” 3149BC; “Ὁθεν καὶ τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀξιώ πατρικὴν ἀγιότητα, ταῦτα πρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς ταπεινότητος ... πατρῷοις θεωρῆσαι τοῖς ὄμμασι, καὶ ἀδελφικοῖς κατανοῆσαι τοῖς βλέμμασι ...” 3196B.

68 “εἰ καρδίας τῆς ἐμῆς τὸ θερμὸν εἰς εὐσέβειαν ἴδοιτε”, 3197A.

69 “ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα Ἡράκλειος ἡσχύνθη, καὶ καταλύσαι μὲν τὰ οἰκεία οὐκ ἠθέλησεν, καὶ πάλιν τὸν ὄνειδισμόν οὐχ ὑπέφερεν. τότε δὴ, ὡς μέγα τι νομίζων ποιεῖν, ἐκτίθεται τὸ λεγόμενον ἴδικτον, περιέχον μῆτε μίαν, μῆτε δύο ὁμολογεῖν ἐνεργείας ἐν Χριστῷ ...”, *Chronographia*, 330, 19–23.

70 *Ibid.*, 330, 23–29.

want to acknowledge that I am reading my own thesis into Theophanes' text, but the text itself seems to be supporting such a thesis.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Theophanes attributes the rise of the Arabs and the defeats of the Roman [Byzantine] army to the fact that "the Church was then shaken by both kings and impious clergy" because of Monothelitism; not so subtle an inference and blame on Heraclius for the Arab victories!<sup>72</sup> Indeed, from the time of the peak of Heraclius' career which was the re-instatement of the cross of Christ (21 March, 630)<sup>73</sup> to his death (641), the Byzantines, and Heraclius personally, experienced only defeats in the hands of the Arab Muslims.<sup>74</sup> It is not, perhaps, coincidental, that when the staunch Chalcedonian Theophanes

71 An article by Alexander Alexakis, "Before the Lateran Council of 649. The Last Days of Herakleios the Emperor and Monothelitism. (Based on a new fragment from his letter to Pope John IV [CPG 9382])" to which I had access before its publication in *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum* 27 (1995), promulgates the thesis that Heraclius was a Monothelite at the time of his death. Although I am not convinced that the evidence which Alexakis uses (a fragment from the tenth-century iconophile florilegium of *Codex Venetus Marcianus Graecus* 573 where the phrase "εἰς Θεός γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν κατὰ οὖν τὰς φύσεις διπλοῦς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δεσποτίαν ἀπλοῦς καὶ ἰδίῳ ἀυθεντικῶ θελήματι τὰ τε θεῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα ἐνεργῆσαι ἠὲ δόκησεν") is sufficient to justify the Monothelite conviction of Heraclius until his deathbed, or that the phrase has been correctly understood as Monothelite, the study does make the point that Heraclius' Monothelite conviction was a widely accepted fact.

72 Cf. below, n. 75.

73 On the exact date of Heraclius' return of the true cross of Christ to Jerusalem and bibliography, see Kaegi, *Byzantium* 74, n. 20. Kaegi prefers 21 March 630, rather than Grumel's 631. Kaegi states that the event "has been neglected, for the history of Byzantine resistance against the Muslims in Palestine and Syria" (p. 74). Perhaps this is too early an event to have played such a role at a time when Muhammad was still alive, the expeditions against Syria and Palestine had not yet started and the Arabs had been defeated at Mu'ta (629) at the hands of the Byzantines. If any meaning, the return of the cross was a trophy of the defeat of the *Persians*, and a symbol of resistance in case of any future return of theirs to the region!

74 Following Kaegi's chronology these are the main military engagements between Muslims and Heraclius during his life: October 630, Muslim expedition against Tabūk (N.W. Arabia); 633 early 634, actual conquest of Syria (Aeropoli/Ma'āb); February 4, 634 defeat at Dāthin near Gaza; 30 July 634, battle of Ajnadayn; 634, Muslim victory at Skythopolis/Fahl; 635, the Muslims capture Damascus and Hims for the first time; August 636, the Muslims evacuate Hims and Damascus (Theodore, brother of Heraclius); 20 August 636, final phase of the battle of Jābiya-Yarmūk; late 636/early 637, the Muslims recapture Damascus, Ba'labakk, Hims; 637, the Muslims capture and occupy Jerusalem; June/July 637, the Muslims capture Gaza and possibly Ascalon for the first time; 637, Byzantine and Muslims agree on a truce at Qinnasrīn/Chalkis; 638, Muslims occupy N. Syria; 639/640, Muslims overrun Byzantine Mesopotamia; 640, Muslims terminate the conquest of Palestine, storm Caesarea Maritima and the final capture of Ascalon; December 639, Muslims depart from Palestine to invade Egypt; early 640, Muslims invade Byzantine Armenia; 640, Mu'āwiya attacked Cilicia, and Euchaita (Anatolia); 11 February 641, Heraclius died.

speaks of the rise and victories of Islam and of the Muslim Arabs, uses the expression which Sophronius coined about them in his Christmas oration; a way, perhaps, of recalling pious Sophronius and his anti-Monothelitism, and Heraclius and his Monothelitism. He writes,

οὕτω δὲ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τότε ὑπὸ τε τῶν βασιλέων, καὶ τῶν δυσσεβῶν ἱερέων  
ταραττομένης, ἀνέστη ὁ ἐρημικώτατος Ἀμαλήκ τύπτων ἡμᾶς τὸν λαὸν τοῦ  
Χριστοῦ ...

(thus, when at that time the Church was in turmoil by [or due to] the kings and the impious clergy, Amelek from the deep desert arose smiting us, the people of Christ.)<sup>75</sup>

Which other kings and priests did Theophanes have in mind except Heraclius and the Monothelite Patriarchs?

In 634, according to Theophanes (AM 6125, 633/4 AD), or August 636 according to Kaegi, and after the defeat of Theodore, brother of Heraclius, and his return to Emessa/Hims, and in spite of a victory by Baanes commanding the army in the place of Theodore, Heraclius “had despaired and abandoned Syria; he took the precious cross (lit. wood) from Jerusalem and went off to Constantinople”;<sup>76</sup> a vividly symbolic act! Heraclius’ despair and his relinquishing of greater Syria, including Palestine and Jerusalem itself, coincide exactly with the patriarchate of Sophronius (634–638)! The death of Sophronius in 638 did not pass Theophanes’ attention unnoticed. It gave him the opportunity to remind his readers who Sophronius was and with whom this Patriarch ought to be contrasted: “an ornament to the church of Jerusalem, in words and in deeds, who struggled against Heraclius and his co-Monothelites, Sergius and Pyrrhos”!<sup>77</sup>

Given the reasons, military and administrative ones, which we mentioned earlier, and adding the personal and confessional ones, one wonders whether it would have been self-explanatory for Heraclius to have rushed to Palestine to bail out Sophronius. Saving the city, which at the time was to him either not in an imminent danger, or beyond delivery, is one thing; but responding to Sophronius, is another. One issue on which the sources do not give us basis

75 *Chronographia*, 332, 8–11.

76 *Ibid.*, 337, 8–10.

77 “ἐν τούτοις ἀπεβίω Σωφρόνιος, ὁ λόγῳ καὶ πράξει τὴν Ἱεροσολύμων κατακοσμήσας ἐκκλησίαν καὶ κατὰ τῆς Ἡρακλείου καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ Μονοθελητῶν κακοδοξίας ἀγωνισάμενος Σεργίου καὶ Πύρρου”. *Ibid.*, 339, 30–32.

to speculate is what Heraclius and the Constantinopolitan bishops were possibly thinking (if they were) about protecting the holy sites and the many pilgrims from the Arabs. Thus it was not only military considerations, but also the whole climate of discontent and division created by the Monothelite controversy which was unravelling in Syria, that made Heraclius disheartened and even unwilling to assist any further the Christians against the Arab onslaught. His wars had been with the Persians; not with the Arabs. The highlight of his career had been the defeat of Chosroes and the return of the holy cross to Jerusalem; this had been his real triumph. Any other battle may have been considered by him risky, and any other (potential) victory, even a major one, against the Muslim Arabs (so close and kin to the Syro-Palestinian Christian Arabs, from whom he had experienced less than an enthusiastic reception and acceptance) might have been considered by him – being an Armenian – anticlimactic and not a matter of his highest priority. Walter Kaegi's *Byzantium and the early Islamic conquests* is an almost exhaustive work on the broad question as to why Byzantium was unable to contain the emergent Islam in its initial years and thus let Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Armenia be lost to the new religion. The answer is to be found in the assessment of the imperial conditions on the eve of the rise of Islam, including ethnic stereotypes, military and religious miscalculations, dangerous strains and inertia in obsolescent fiscal, military and political institutions and attitudes, as well as some principal military campaigns and battles. Religious miscalculations aggravated by an incompatible personal chemistry between Heraclius, a Roman in culture, and Sophronius, a Syrian mystic, seem very much to have to do with it; at least with regard to the defence of Jerusalem.

## The Demonizing Force of the Arab Conquests: The Case of Maximus (ca. 580–662) as a Political “Confessor”

Two conflicting images of Maximus’ life and personality emerge from three sources, a traditional Greek *vita* written obviously by an admirer of Maximus and dated from about the time of the viith Ecumenical Council (680/1) thus almost contemporary to Maximus’ times;<sup>1</sup> another seventh-eighth century polemical Syriac biography by the Monothelite Maronite George of Resh’aina;<sup>2</sup> and various other hagiological *vitae*.<sup>3</sup> According to the latter, Maximus grew near Tiberias. At an early age he entered the monastery of Mar Chariton, south of Bethlehem. The Persian invasion forced him to flee Palestine, first to Asia Minor and Crete and then to N. Africa where he arrived in the 620s. The Greek *vita* makes Maximus a native of Constantinople, son of an aristocratic family, who after a thorough education and imperial service as first secretary becomes a monk and develops into a profound theologian, ardent defender of the doctrine of the two natures and wills in Christ. As it has been shown this *vita* is based, to a significant extent, on material belonging to various accounts known as *Acta* dealing with Maximus’ trial, with additions (especially on his early life) from various sources far removed from the time of the saint.<sup>4</sup> A main piece of the *Acta* is the so-called *Relatio Motionis*.<sup>5</sup> Its full title in Greek, *Ἐξήγησις τῆς κινήσεως, γενομένης, μεταξύ τοῦ κυροῦ ἀββᾶ Μαξίμου, καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ,*

1 PG 90,68A–109B. L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and mediator. The theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund 1965), p. 1, n. 1.

2 “The narrative concerning the wicked Maximos of Palestine, who blasphemed against his creator and his tongue was cut out”, in S. Brock, *An early Syriac life of Maximus the Confessor. AnBoll* 91 (1973), pp. 299–346, Syriac text, pp. 302–312, trans. pp. 314–319. Brock has given credence to the Syriac *vita* and its author (p. 342) on the ground that it does not seem to contradict flagrantly whatever little we know of seventh-century history from other sources; although he acknowledges that the details of Maximus’ birth and parentage “may have attracted certain mythical attachments”. This *vita* makes Maximus native of a village, Hesfin, son of a non-Christian Samaritan father, Abna, from Sychar and of a Persian Zoroastrian slave girl, SNDH, in the service of a certain Jew named Zadok from Tiberias, conceived out of wedlock. Under pressure from his fellow Samaritans, Maximus’ father freed the girl and fled to the village of Hesfin where for two years father and mother were offered protection by a priest called Martyrios and baptized with the name Theonas and Mary. *Ibidem*, 314.1–2.

3 BHG<sup>3</sup>, 2.106–107, nos 1233m–1236d.

4 R. Devreesse, “La vie de S. Maxime le Confesseur et ses recensions”, *AnBoll* 46 (1928), 5–49.

5 PG 90,109C–129D.

καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐπὶ σεκρέτου, points to “An [expanded] Record of the [trial] proceedings” between Maximus and his accusers [taken place] in the [confines of the imperial] court”, dated May, 655<sup>6</sup> some seven years before Maximus’ death in Lazica, August 13, 662, after his tongue had been excised and his hands amputated. Maximus’ whole life (580–662), and not only from the period of his residence in Africa, as stated by Sherwood,<sup>7</sup> is made up of three interwoven elements: his monastic-hesychastic life, his relations with the court in Constantinople and its imperial governors (especially in Africa), and his activity against Monothelitism. We will concentrate on the second.

Maximus was in a position to know the imperial court and understand Heraclius (5 October, 610–February, 641) as, before embarking upon his monastic vocation, the emperor had sought him personally and used him as his first secretary (“ὑπογραφέα”) and then “minister and adjutant” (“ὑπουργὸν καὶ συλλήπτορα”).<sup>8</sup> During his service Maximus forged close relationships and friendship with men in the imperial court who, like the emperor, valued his wisdom, his good advice, his eloquent and quick speech,<sup>9</sup> as Maximus’ subsequent correspondence with at least one of them, John the Chamberlain, testifies. Maximus’ tenure of service in the Constantinopolitan court was short. Some time between 613–614 he left Constantinople for Chrysopolis on the Asiatic coast to pursue the monastic life (“πρὸς τὸν μονάδα βίον”);<sup>10</sup> thence at times the reference to him as “Chrysopolites”.<sup>11</sup> From Chrysopolis and between the years 624–625 Maximus resided in the monastery of St. George in Cyzicus, today’s Erdek. In Cyzicus he became close friend to the local bishop John, to whom he later wrote letters.<sup>12</sup> It was from these monasteries that Maximus wrote, or conceived, most of his major works, particularly *On the Ascetical Life* (*Liber Asceticus*), the *Quaestiones et Dubia*, and a number of epistles.<sup>13</sup> In the Spring of 626 Maximus experienced the advance of the Persians an event which

6 P. Sherwood O.S.B., *An Annotated Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor* (Rome 1952), p. 56, n. 89. In this otherwise indispensable work Sherwood keeps referring to Maximus and the Chalcedonians, anachronistically, as members of the “Catholic community”!

7 Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 7.

8 PG 90, 69A.

9 PG 90, 72C.

10 PG 90, 72D.

11 Mostly because of the silence over his title in later literature, scholars have doubted the assertion of the *vita* that Maximus under pressure accepted ever the position of abbot. For bibliography on this point, see Thunberg, *Microcosm and mediator*, 3–4, and n. 5. Cf. also A. Louth, “Recent research on St. Maximus the Confessor”, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 42 (1998), p. 77.

12 Ep. 6, 8?, 28, 31, Sherwood, *Date-List*, nos. 5, 19–20, 16, 18, 17, 20.

13 Cf. Sherwood, *Date-List*, nos. 10–15, and 1–9.

brought about the dissolution of St. George's monastery. This event seems to have prompted Maximus' departure to Africa<sup>14</sup> and Rome, more than heresy itself, even though these regions were free from the monoenergetic and Monothelite theologies which in the East had reached the Patriarch and the emperor himself.<sup>15</sup> Pentecost of the year 632, when Heraclius imposed baptism on Jews and Samaritans,<sup>16</sup> finds Maximus in Carthage where he had arrived via Crete and, perhaps, Cyprus.<sup>17</sup>

In Africa Maximus became closely connected with the Byzantine governors Peter, *strategos* of Numidia, and George. Maximus wrote to Peter two epistles, *ep.* 13<sup>18</sup> and *ep.* 14.<sup>19</sup> His relationship with George was closer. There is one epistle, *ep.* 1, addressed to him.<sup>20</sup> These three epistles contain some of the earliest references of Byzantine literature to the Arab conquests. Interestingly enough they are also the most comprehensive ones of Maximus' own political views. Of some nine other epistles sent also to John the Chamberlain in Constantinople or referring to him (in chronological order *ep.* 2–4, 10, 43, 27, 12, 44, 45), *ep.* 10 and *ep.* 43 are of particular importance to our discussion. We will focus, therefore, on some of these epistles chronologically, as well as on the trial record, in an effort to follow Maximus' progressive criticism of, and alienation from, imperial authority, as well as to discern the true forces which formulated Maximus' conviction and led to his most cruel end as Confessor, not merely of faith but of political intrigue as well.

### 1 *Ep.* 10 to John the Chamberlain (PG 91:449A–453A)

This epistle was written by 626, very soon after Maximus' departure from the imperial court and during his stay in Cyzicus, or between 630–34 during his

14 R. Devreesse, "La fin inédite d'une lettre de s. Maxime", *Revue des Sciences religieuses* 17 (1937), pp. 25–35, at 31ff.

15 PG 90, 76A. According to Maximus' biographer, Heraclius had been introduced to the heresy of Mono-energetism (affirming one single energy in the person of Christ) by Athanasius, the Jacobite bishop of Hierapolis, Syria. PG 90, 76CD.

16 On the basis of R. Devreesse's publication of the unedited final paragraph of *ep.* 8. "La fin inédite d'une lettre de Saint Maxime: Un baptême forcé des Juifs et des Samaritains à Carthage en 632", *Revue des Sciences religieuses* 17 (1937), pp. 25–35.

17 Cf. reference to correspondence with a Cypriot by the name Marinus, in Sherwood, *Date-List*, 5.

18 PG 91, 509B–533A; cf. also *Relatio Motionis*, PG 90, 112B.

19 PG 91, 533B–544C.

20 PG 91, 364A–392D.



early years in Africa.<sup>21</sup> It was written in response to John's question as to why God has determined that humans may be ruled (lit. βασιλεύεσθαι = reigned) by others since all human beings are of one and the same kind. This is an important question considering that it came from an insider of the imperial court, the response to which may be taken as expressing Maximus' own political views in general. Serving under Heraclius, John could not have any other ruler in mind than this emperor. Maximus' response can be summarized as follows. Rule has been ordained in order to protect humans from turning against their own kind and to reject God's kindness (449BC). Life is full of hardships and departing from it should be considered preferable to being attached to it (449D). However, because of human attachment to this life God has allowed that humans be reigned by other humans in order, by curtailing further vicious assaults against life by evil, to make life more bearable (452A). Rule has been ordained so that humans may not devour each other like the fish in the ocean, and the stronger suppress the weak (452A). God has allowed those of the same kind to exercise control over their own by means of laws (452B). Rule is exercised with God's consent for the purpose of averting anarchy and revolt, of claiming authority by everyone, for inducing people to live in peace by means of words, and for inspiring fear towards those who plot to commit evil. Maximus expresses his own "political philosophy" in the concluding paragraph, that a king who acts in this manner "is second to God on earth, minister of the divine will, with authority from God to reign over human beings" (452D); however, a king who behaves in the opposite manner "is a tyrant, something which leads ruler and the ruled ones to the precipice of perdition" (453A). Is this a notice served on those in the court, Heraclius himself, and the citizens ruled by him? If the epistle is dated on 626, Heraclius' rule was under a particular strain on that year. On August 7 Constantinople had been under the double siege of the Avars and the Persians, although the siege ended in failure. If it is dated between 630–634, the letter might have in mind Heraclius' heavy handed imposition of baptism of Jews in Carthage (632) to which Maximus had objected (*ep.* 8) not so much for the sake of the Jews, but on the ground that such a forced conversion might in fact dilute the Christian community itself.<sup>22</sup> My reading of *ep.* 10 is that this must be dated between 630–634. The

21 Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 26, no. 9.

22 Following the vehement attack on the Arabs in *ep.* 14 [cf. below], Maximus turned in greater length against the Jews. On the literature related to this event cf. R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J., 1997), pp. 78f.

actual nuances of Maximus' rationale were lost to his accusers some thirty years later!

## 2 *Ep. 43 to John the Chamberlain (PG 91,637B–641C)*

In this letter<sup>23</sup> Maximus expresses his joy at receiving a letter from his “God-guarded lord” with a reference to peace (“μετὰ τῆς εἰρήνης” 637B); an allusion perhaps to the peace treaty which Chosroes signed with the Byzantines in 628.<sup>24</sup> Maximus infers also that he is far away from John, physically,<sup>25</sup> although this may not necessarily mean that he had already arrived in Africa as from 626 to 632 he was passing through Crete and possibly Cyprus. On this occasion he uses the opportunity to speak about the benefits of peace not between rival ethnic enemies but among Christians, and of the obligation they have to submit themselves to the sovereignty of Christ to whom they ought to pay their dues – an implicit juxtaposition to earthly sovereignty and to the dues paid by one nation to another (as the Persians to the Byzantines, 640AB). In conclusion he remarks that humans become worthy of peace when they eradicate their passions which result in a revolt against God (640C). One may read Maximus' remark on one's revolt against God as an inference to Heraclius' deviation from orthodoxy and his adoption of Monoenergetism, the teaching promulgated in 619 and accepted as a compromise in the place of Monophysitism.

## 3 *Ep. 13 to Peter the Illustrious, Strategos of Numidia, against the Teachings of Severus” (PG 91:509B–533A)*

What prompted Maximus to write this letter was Peter's own message to Maximus on the safe completion of his voyage by sea (obviously from Numidia to Alexandria on orders from Heraclius in 633), and of some former converts to orthodoxy who had relapsed to Severian Monophysitism. After a warm introduction (509B–512A) in which Maximus praises the humility and meekness of his “blessed lord” Peter,<sup>26</sup> the author makes an analysis of the Monophysite

23 Except for the inscription of the recipient, this epistle is identical to *ep. 24* (PG 91, 608B–613A) to Constantine *sakellarios*, the assumption being that the same letter was sent to both persons. Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 32–3, no. 28.

24 Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 32.

25 “... καθ’ ἣν ἀλλήλων ἀπεῖναι οὐδέποτε δύνανται, κἄν πολλῶ διεστῆκασιν ἀλλήλων σωματικῶς τῷ τοπικῶ διαστήματι”. 637C.

26 “... ἐνδιαθέτως καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκτῆσατο τὴν πραότητά τε καὶ τὴν ταπεινώσιν”. PG 91, 509D.

concept of “σύνθετος φύσις” which he refutes and contrasts to the orthodox “σύνθετος ὑπόστασις”.<sup>27</sup> In the end Maximus apologises for not being able to substantiate his words with quotations from the Patristic literature as there are no books in his possession; a signal that the letter must belong to an early stage of Maximus’ residence in N. Africa. For this reason he urges Peter on spiritual and dogmatic matters to consult the “Father, and teacher, master abbot” Sophronius (“Πατέρα τε καὶ διδάσκαλον κύριον ἀββᾶν Σωφρόνιον”) whom Maximus praises as “truly mindful and wise advocate of truth, undefeated champion of the divine doctrines, able to struggle with words and deeds against all heresies along with everything else that is good, rich in possession of books, and eager to enrich everyone who wishes to learn things which are divine” (533A). Sophronius was at the time in Alexandria taking part in the affair of the *Tomos* (633); another indication that Peter was already in Alexandria himself. The use of the title “ἀββᾶς” points to Sophronius as being still the abbot of the monastery he had established in N. Africa bearing his own epithet “Eucratas”. Sophronius was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem on June 634; a terminus *ante quem*. There is ample internal evidence, therefore, to date this epistle between 633, the year of Peter’s sail to Alexandria, and June 634.<sup>28</sup>

As its title indicates, the epistle is dogmatic in character. There is no direct political inference or criticism in it. The whole Epistle, however, constitutes a revolt against the official policy of imposing the Monothelite doctrine, and a moratorium on any further doctrinal disputations. If there is anything that might be the cause of some discomfort to the political authorities in this Epistle, this is the heartfelt reference to Sophronius (an ardent champion against both, Monoenergetism and Monothelitism) a position embraced by the emperor himself and the Patriarchal Sees of Constantinople and Alexandria.

#### 4 *Ep. 14 to the Same (Peter), “A Dogmatic Epistle” (PG 91,533B–544C)*

In this epistle Maximus is asking Peter to use his good offices and intercede with the “God honoured pope” to receive back to Church the carrier of this letter, deacon Cosmas from Alexandria (a former Monophysite?) returning now to his family and friends. This pope can be no other than Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria who in 640 was summoned to Constantinople to be rebuked by the emperor, not to return to his seat before the summer of 641. Thus, *ep. 14* follows

27 “ὁ καὶ παράδοξον, ὑπόστασιν σύνθετον θεᾶσθαι, χωρὶς τῆς κατ’ εἶδος αὐτῆς κατηγορημένης συνθέτου φύσεως”. *PG* 91, 517C.

28 Cf. also Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 40–1.

the lengthy *ep.* 15 “to Cosmas ... deacon of Alexandria”<sup>29</sup> dated after 634,<sup>30</sup> it falls into the same period, 634–640, and more specifically between 634–36, the period of the Arab conquest of Syria.<sup>31</sup> Outlining on his behalf Cosmas’ own faith (536A–537B),<sup>32</sup> Maximus uses the opportunity to reiterate his orthodox theology vis-à-vis the Monophysite one. While *ep.* 13 is purely dogmatic, *ep.* 14 is loaded with political implications. In pleading for Cosmas’ acceptance, Maximus makes reference to the successful Arab advances in Syria, a disaster which he attributes to the iniquities of the Christians themselves. Taking from that, he remarks that it is time for all Christians to come together, be of one faith and ask for God’s protection and comfort, now that so many challenges have arisen. To make, perhaps, his point stronger he resorts to an uncharacteristically forceful language to paint the threat coming from the Arabs. He writes:

For indeed, what is more dire than the evils which afflict the world today? For those who can discern what is more painful than the unfolding events? What is more pitiful and frightening for those who are now enduring them? To see a barbarous nation from the desert overrunning another’s lands as if they were their own, and civilization [lit. the peaceful way of life] itself being ravaged by wild and untamed beasts who are only bearing the mere appearance of human beings.<sup>33</sup>

Such chastisement of the enemy would have been welcomed as a psychological boost to the morale of the Byzantine population if Maximus had not made Christian conduct, including that of their rulers, responsible for the defeat of the Christians in the hands of this “bestly” nation. He writes:

What is, as I said, more disastrous to the Christian eyes and ears? To see a pitiless and quaint nation allowed to raise its hand against the divine heritage! But all these are happening because of the many sins which we have committed. For we have not conducted ourselves in a manner

29 *PG* 91, 544D–576B.

30 Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 40, no. 46.

31 Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 40–1, no. 47.

32 Cosmas had asked earlier Maximus to provide him with such a definition of the orthodox faith and Maximus responded with an extensive epistle. Cf. *ep.* 15, *PG* 91, 544D–576D, dated after 634, between 634–40; Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 40, no. 46.

33 Τί γάρ τῶν νῦν περιεχόντων τὴν οἰκουμένην κακῶν περιστατικώτερον; τί δὲ τοῖς ἡσθημένοις τῶν γινομένων δεινότερον; τί δὲ τοῖς πάσχουσιν ἔλκεινότερον ἢ φοβερώτερον; Ἔθνος ὄραν ἐρημικόν τε καὶ βάρβαρον, ὡς ἰδίαν γῆν διατρέχον τὴν ἀλλοτρίαν· καὶ θηρσὶν ἀγρίοις καὶ ἀτιθάσσις, μόνης ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσιν ψιλὸν σχῆμα μορφῆς, τὴν ἡμερον πολιτείαν δαπανωμένην ...” *ep.* 14, *PG* 91, 533B–544C, at 540A. Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 77–8.

worthy of the Gospel of Christ. We all have sinned, we all have been unlawful, we all have abandoned the way of the commandments which says, “I am the way”, and we have attacked each other [or, raised ourselves against each other] like beasts, ignoring the grace of love for humankind and the mystery of the sufferings of God who became flesh for our sake.<sup>34</sup>

The key phrase “we all have attacked each other like beasts” (“πάντες κατ’ ἀλλήλων ἐθριώθημεν”) is, perhaps, referring to the heavy-handed oppression, mostly by the state, of those with differing doctrinal beliefs. A harsh critique like this coming from an ardent Dyothelite becomes even more belittling as the author pointedly reminds his readers that the “divine inheritance” is now occupied and shamed by “a pitiless and quaint nation” (“ἔθνος ἀπηνές καὶ ἀλλόκοτο”)! Such a context and contrast must have infuriated the imperial authorities who must have taken this assessment of the Arab invasions, especially at such an early date, as malevolent and treasonous, undermining the Christian morale.<sup>35</sup> One is reminded here of the ire which John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749) arose to the Constantinopolitan court, to the extent that he was anathematized by the iconoclastic council of 754 as “Saracene-minded” (“Σαρακηνοφρων”) and “conspirator against the empire” (“... ἐπιβούλω τῆς βασιλείας”), along with being a “bastard”, “falsifier” (i.e. liar), “insulter of Christ”, “teacher of impiety”, and “perverter of the Scriptures”! There is more than a verbal hyperbole in these adjectives and accusations. John of Damascus’ opposition to Emperor Leo III’s iconoclastic edict was the pretext, but his intimate association to the Umayyad court in the Muslim occupied Damascus may have been the true cause.

## 5 *Ep. 12 to John the Chamberlain (PG 91: 460A–509B)*

This lengthy *ep. 12 to John the Chamberlain* written in November–December 641<sup>36</sup> provides the background of events which led to the writing of *ep. 1 to*

34 Τί τοῦτων, ὡς ἔφην, Χριστιανῶν ὀφθαλμοῖς, ἢ ἀκοαῖς φοβερῶτερον; Ἐθνος ἀπηνές καὶ ἀλλόκοτον, κατὰ τῆς θείας κληρονομίας ὄρῳ ἐπανατείνεσθαι χεῖρας συγχωρούμενον. Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα τὸ πλῆθος ὧν ἡμάρτομεν συμβῆναι πεποιήκαμεν. Οὐ γὰρ ἀξίως τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πεπολιτεύμεθα. Πάντες ἡμάρτομεν, πάντες ἠνομήσαμεν, πάντες ἀφήκαμεν τὴν ὁδὸν τῶν ἐντολῶν τὴν εἰποῦσαν, “Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδός”, καὶ κατ’ ἀλλήλων ἐθριώθημεν, ἀγνοήσαντες τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τὴν χάριν, καὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τοῦ σαρκωθέντος Θεοῦ παθημάτων τὸ μυστήριον”. *PG* 91, 533B–544C, at 541BC.

35 G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio* t. 13 (Florence 1867), 356D; and D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden 1972), p. 4.

36 Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 45–48, no. 66.

George, eparch of Africa, which we will discuss next. At this point it is important to note that all of Maximus' epistles to John, whom he calls "my lord", are extensive, pastoral and instructive in character. They were also written some thirty years (this particular one twenty-eight) after he had left Constantinople; something which shows that Maximus had after a long time friends in the imperial court whom he could address as equal, and even register complains with them.<sup>37</sup> In this epistle Maximus makes critical remarks about the political and moral climate of Constantinople. He complains also that he had not received advance notice from John about an imperial secretary by the name Theodore (460A) who had been sent to Egypt carrying a letter from Martina, the queen (evidence that Heraclius had already died),<sup>38</sup> with orders that the eparch of Africa releases the nuns of the abbess Joannias of Alexandria (465B) and of the "Sacerdos" monastery (465A), all of them of the Severian heresy! According to Maximus, George had rejected the letter as forgery, made a show against the envoy, and turned hard against the heretics; all this in order to clear the name of the empress as heretic, or heretic-sympathizer. George's assessment of forgery and his subsequent actions had been supported by Maximus himself (461D) and the Eucratades,<sup>39</sup> the monks of Sophronius' monastery. In this epistle Maximus gives his own account of conduct of the heretic nuns of Alexandria<sup>40</sup> and praises George's lofty character praising his efforts to convince those heretics who came from Syria, Egypt, Alexandria and Libya to return to the fold of the Church (cf. 465A). He proceeds then with a lengthy refutation of Severian Monophysitism (465D–500A) and with an exposition of the orthodox teaching,<sup>41</sup> noting that he is writing all this not because he

37 Cf. also his statement in *ep.* 43 (sent also to Constantine *sakellarios* as *ep.* 24) where he refers to his closeness with them in spite of their physical distance: "... καθ' ἣν ἀλλήλων ἀπεῖναι οὐδέποτε δύνανται, καὶ πολλῶν διεστήκασιν ἀλλήλων σωματικῶς τῷ τοπικῷ διαστήματι" (637C).

38 Martina (whom Maximus calls *δέσποινα* and *πατρικία*, 460B), was Heraclius' niece and second wife. After the death of Heraclius (February 10, 641) she ruled, as Heraclius had willed, together with Heraclius' son Heraclius Constantine, from his first wife, Fabia/Eudokia, and with Martina's own son Heraclonas; they were all disgraced in October of that year. Constans II, son of Heraclius Constantine and Heraclius' own grandson, was able to rule in November 9, 641. Maximus seems to be unaware of these events. Cf. Sherwood, *Date-List*, 47. George, the eparch of Africa and recipient of the imperial letter, probably had knowledge of these events; that is why he was inclined to dismiss the letter as forgery.

39 "οἱ ἐπίκλην Εὐκρατάδες" (461A).

40 Maximus makes reference to the convent's practice of rebaptizing those joining it ("... καὶ παραβαπτίσματα ποιεῖν τοῦ μὲν" 464B).

41 While in *ep.* 13 Maximus is not quoting Fathers of the Church because he did not have books with him as he had been on African soil for long, he can quote nevertheless Cyril of Alexandria and to a lesser extent Gregory the Theologian and Basil.

had any doubts about John's own faith and its firmness but out of a deep concern for John's predicament in the Constantinopolitan court in the midst of those "champions of heresy" ("τοὺς τῶν αἱρέσεων προμάχους").<sup>42</sup> The times were charged with politico-doctrinal empathy, and the year 641 the year when Heraclius died and Babylon in Egypt had surrendered to the Arabs, was particularly traumatic and unsettled. Maximus was, perhaps, offering ammunition to those "champions of heresy" who, on the first opportunity, would retaliate against him!

## 6 *Ep. 1 to Lord George, Eparch of Africa (PG 91: 364A–392D)*

This Epistle, following *ep. 18*<sup>43</sup> is, actually, a homily of exhortation and a farewell message to George as he was sailing to Constantinople. *Ep. 18* is a letter by George to the nuns, apostates from the orthodox, written by Maximus himself in George's name, which provides the background for *ep. 1*. In *ep. 18* George [i.e. Maximus] was urging nuns in Alexandria who in December 641 or January 642 had lapsed to Monophysitism to return to the Church, threatening them with confiscation of the property he had previously made available to them. He was also stating that he was about to travel to Constantinople and report their relapse to the emperor leaving their fate to him.<sup>44</sup> Thus the date of *ep. 1* must be late of 641, or early 642.<sup>45</sup> George's trip to Constantinople was either for health reasons,<sup>46</sup> or for consultation with the emperor, or it may have been a recall to answer questions; the last being the most probable reason. Maximus wrote three epistles to his friend John the Chamberlain, one questioning George's recall (*ep. 12*) and two pleading for his speedy and safe return (*ep. 44*

42 "ἀλλ' εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς βουλόμενος, ὁποῖον καὶ ὅποσον ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν ἀγῶνα, διὰ μερίμνης αἰεὶ μου ἐκκαίοντα τὴν καρδίαν· καὶ παρατηρεῖσθαι νηφαλαιότερον παρακαλῶ τοὺς τῶν αἱρέσεων προμάχους· ἵνα μὴ τις αὐτῶν παραλογισάμενος ὑμᾶς ἐν πειθανολογίᾳ ψεύδους, τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν διαυγές καὶ ζωτικὸν τῆς πίστεως νᾶμα τοῖς ἰδίῳ τῶν ἀσεβῶν δογματῶν ἐπιθολῶσαι ῥύποις δυνηθῆ, ὅπερ μὴ γένοιτο" PG 91,508D. Thunburg is not particularly accurate when he uses Maximus' letters to John as an indication that his relations with the court were good. *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Lund 1965, 3.

43 PG 91, 584D–589B.

44 Cf. Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 48, no. 67.

45 Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 49, n. 69.

46 Cf. 373D. Maximus extends his wishes and those of the Fathers of the province for the restoration of George's health: "Σὺν ἐμοὶ δὲ γνησίως πάντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν οἱ ταύτην διὰ σὲ παροικούντες τὴν χώραν τίμιοι Πατέρες ἀσπάζονται, νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἀπαύστως μετὰ δακρύων τὸν Θεὸν ἱκετεύοντες, ἀποκαταστήσαι μεθ' ὑγείας ἡμῖν τὸν ἡμῶν Γεώργιον, τὸν ὄντως γλυκὺν καὶ ὀρώμενον καὶ ὀνομαζόμενον ..." 392AB.

and 45).<sup>47</sup> In *ep.* 1 Maximus expresses the wish that George may be allowed to return to Africa so that his presence may be enjoyed by the people of the province.<sup>48</sup> Particularly affectionate, Maximus praises George's manners,<sup>49</sup> his many virtues and his love for the poor and the needy (372D–373C). It is in this context that he urges George to protect himself from the vices and dangers which one may encounter in Constantinople and which he enumerates; not so complimentary a report on the state of the imperial court in particular! Such traps and vices included a spirit that leads away from any virtuous and *theotic* disposition;<sup>50</sup> a tendency towards material things;<sup>51</sup> fear of human threat which shakes one's good intention to remain steadfast;<sup>52</sup> flattery that unnerves the soul;<sup>53</sup> retaliating for an injury, which corrupts the peace of the soul;<sup>54</sup> desire to rule over others, which curtails any love for God;<sup>55</sup> and all in all a climate corruptive of one's spiritual disposition.<sup>56</sup> An enumeration of such specific spiritual and moral pitfalls would have made little sense if Maximus did not know personally that such vices characterized life in the Constantinopolitan court.

This epistle is a profoundly spiritual and mystical exhortation, talking about striving after “incorporating in one's self the fullness of God, and becoming wholly god by grace” (376A), “becoming integrated with ourselves and with God, or rather with God alone” (377D), and pursuing a spiritual struggle of humility, fasting, vigils, prayer, and the reading of divine words (388A). Maximus' ascetic ideals and hesychastic qualities calling for a renunciation of the world we see “which will pass away taking along its own end giving its

47 *Ep.* 12 is dated November–December, 641 (Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 45–8, no. 66); *ep.* 44, Winter 642 (Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 49–50, no. 70), and *ep.* 45 early 642. Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 50–1, no. 72.

48 “ποθοῦμεν πάλιν σε θεάσασθαι παρόντα, καὶ ἀπολαύσαι σου τῆς καλλονῆς”. (364A).

49 “τοῖς θείοις μέν τοι τῶν συντρόφων ἀρετῶν κεχαρακτηρισμένον τρόποις”. (364A).

50 “Μὴ τοίνυν ταύτης, δέσποτά μου εὐλογημένη, τῆς ἀγαθῆς καὶ θεωτικῆς ἕξεως, τῆς ἐχούσης σου πρὸς Θεὸν τὴν γνώμην συνέκδημον, ἐκστήσῃ τι τῶν ὄντων δυναθῆ”. (365AB).

51 “μὴ χρόνος ἀτάκτως ἑαυτῷ συμμεταβάλλων τὴν τῶν ὑλικῶν πραγμάτων φορὰν, τῆς γνώμης ἀλλοιώσῃ τὸ βásiμον”. (365B).

52 “μὴ ἀνθρώπων ἀπειλὴ φόβον προτεινομένη, τῆς καλῆς διαθέσεως μετακινήσῃ τὸ στάσιμον”. (365B).

53 “μὴ λόγος κολάκων ἀνδρῶν τῇ προφορᾷ καταγλυκαίνων τὴν ἀκοὴν τῆς ψυχῆς χαυνώσῃ τὸ εὐτόνον”. (365B).

54 “μὴ ὄρεξις ἀντιλυπήσεως, ἐκ τοῦ δύνασθαι τυχὸν πρὸς τινα, τὸ σύνολον διαφθείρῃ τοῦ τρόπου τοῦ ἡμερον”. (365B).

55 “μὴ πόθος περὶ τὸ ἄρχειν δόξης, τῆς περὶ τὸ Θεῖον ἀγάπης μειώσῃ τὴν ἔφεσιν”. (365B).

56 “... Καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν, μὴ νόσος, μὴ ὑγεία, μὴ πλοῦτος ὁ κάτω συρόμενος, μὴ πενία τῶν φθειρομένων, μὴ ψόγος, μὴ ἔπαινος, μὴ θάνατος, μὴ ζωὴ, μὴ τὸ παρὸν, μὴ τὸ μέλλον, μὴδὲ καθάπαξ ἕτερον τῶν ὄντων ἢ γινομένων, τὴν θρηψαμένην σε ταύτην, καὶ εἰς τότε προαγαγοῦσαν παρὰ τε Θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώποις κλέος φιλοσοφίαν, νοθεῦσαι δυναθῆ”. (365CD).



place to the eternal and incorruptible world” (389C), are unmistakable in this exhortation. By nature, as well as in style and content, this is a critique against secularism and the centres of earthly power. Addressed to a governor who is sailing to the court of the empire it constitutes, indirectly, a repudiation of earthly authority.<sup>57</sup> A key point in this exhortation is Maximus’ assertion that governing or being governed, like that of being rich or poor, is not a matter of nature or of volition (γνώμη) but a matter of God’s providence which governs all things (cf. 392C). With such expressed anti-establishment views Maximus could not be considered as the most popular person among secular-minded people of his time – Monothelites, or not.

#### 7 *Ep. 44 to John the Chamberlain (PG 91:641D–648C)*

This is a spiritual advisory epistle, written during the winter of 642,<sup>58</sup> in which Maximus pleads with John to remain steadfast to the one and only goal in life, to follow Christ and not be attached to this prevalent and false world (“τὸν πλάνον κόσμον καὶ κοσμοκράτορα”);<sup>59</sup> a clear critique of secular power. Maximus must by now have been disillusioned by the heresy and unfaithfulness of the imperial court and trying to protect at least his closest friends from its snares. He then asks John to receive the carrier of his epistle, Theocharistos,<sup>60</sup> a fine person, “protector of my community” (645A), “ready comforter during many, frequent and painful circumstances [or sicknesses]” (645A). He pleads with John so that the carrier, whom Maximus and others have a ready master in every good deed, be allowed to return (645B); an inference that persons unfavourably recalled by the court were prevented from returning to their post, or homeland! At this point Maximus becomes bold and, although he prays for the wellbeing of the “kings”,<sup>61</sup> he expresses his anger at the holding of George, a benefactor of the exiled monks. The epistle enumerates George’s virtues and the good deeds he has performed as governor (645C–648C), ending with the

57 Cf. below, n. 72.

58 Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 49–50, no. 70. However the reference to “kings”, in the plural, may be pointing to a date before November 9, 641 when Constans II began reigning alone.

59 “... ἓνα καὶ μόνον ἔχοντα σκοπὸν ἀκολουθήσαι ..., μηδενὶ καταδεθέντα τὸ παράπαν πατριᾶς δεσμῷ πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν πλάνον κόσμον καὶ κοσμοκράτορα” (644C).

60 Is this a proper name lost in the adjectives (“Illustrious lord God-graced “Ἰλλούστριον κύριον θεοχάριστον, τὸν ἐπιφερόμενον τὴν παρούσαν μου μετρίαν συλλαβὴν ...” 644D), or another adjective? In the Migne edition “Illustrios” is capitalized while “theochariston” is not. Sherwood, does the opposite, signaling Theocharistos as the proper name of the carrier of this letter. *Date-List*, 49.

61 The plural implies co-emperors.

bold statement that “no one has been more authentic a servant of their [the kings] reign” (648C). Considering the context and the details of this epistle one may suggest that this Illustrious “God-graced” (θεοχάριστος) lord was none other than George himself, the eparch of Africa, carrier of the letter!<sup>62</sup>

## 8 *Ep. 45 to John the Chamberlain (PG 91:648D–649C)*

This epistle, written early in 642,<sup>63</sup> is another plea with John to intercede with the kings<sup>64</sup> for the return of Eparch George, and “convince them not to listen to the malicious tongues of lawless people who, like with a sharpened shaver, commit trickery and love evil rather than kindness”;<sup>65</sup> hard and unambiguous words against court officials. They are repeated in *ep. 16*, dated also as early as 642, to Cosmas, deacon of Alexandria, where Maximus clearly states that George is kept captive in Constantinople suffering bitter punishments as a result of malicious tongues and accusations from those who have no fear of God.<sup>66</sup> *Ep. 45* exhorts once more the virtues of George and enumerates the many philanthropic works he has accomplished in his eparchy. What was the reason of George’s maltreatment? The most obvious one, his rejection of Martina’s letter and the actions George took contrary to its directives, can be dismissed on the basis that there hardly any time had lapsed between its writing and the downfall of the queen which had taken place before Theodore’s arrival in Alexandria. What is then left is the naked sycophancy rampant in the imperial court.<sup>67</sup> This epistle, therefore, may reveal the actual conditions which formed the climate for Maximus’ own trial, exiles and mutilation; which brings us to documents in which the central figure is now Maximus himself!

62 Sherwood suggests that it is not possible that “in a letter of which George was the bearer there should occur a description of that same George’s departure” (648B), even though there is a hint to this matter in *ep. 12*. *Date-List*, pp. 49–50. This, however, may not be a strong argument.

63 Sherwood, *Date-List*, pp. 50–1, no. 72.

64 Cf. above, notes 59 and 61.

65 “καὶ πείσαι γλώσσας ἀδίκους ἀνδρῶν παρανόμων μὴ παραδέχασθαι, ποιούσας δόλον ὡσεὶ ξυρὸν ἠκονημένον, καὶ ἀγαπώσας κακία ὑπὲρ ἀγαθωσύνην” (649B).

66 “... ἐκ συκοφαντίας τῶν μὴ φοβούντων τὸν Κύριον, τῷ γενναίῳ τῶν ἀρετῶν φύλακι κυρίῳ Γεωργίῳ. φθάσαν παρεμυθήσατο τὸ γράμμα σου τὸ ἱερόν, ὅσιε Πάτερ” (576D–577A).

67 Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 50.

9        **The *Vita* [PG 90, 68A–109B] and the *Relatio Motionis* [PG 90, 109C–129D], or *Ἐξήγησις τῆς κινήσεως* (= Record of the Trial Proceedings)<sup>68</sup>**

The “*vita*” and other *Acta* related to Maximus’ “trial” form the basis of his life story. They also reveal the psychological state of official Constantinople at the time of the rise of Islam and of the earliest Arab conquests, and its attitude towards Maximus. The documents liven Maximus’ epistles which we have discussed, shedding also light on his “political” juxtaposition with the Constantinopolitan establishment. We are treating, therefore, these documents as a unit.

The trial itself took place in Constantinople in the month of May 655, some seven years before Maximus’ death. According to the *vita*, Maximus’ main accuser was a sakellarios who, in spite of or, perhaps, because of his very progressed age [eighty years old at the time of the trial (90, 88C), thus fifty-eight years old at the time of the events for which he accused Maximus] was in a position to offer an eye and ear witness testimony and, thus, be particularly intimidating. In the words of the biographer,

When that ill-named Sakellarios was brought in front of the saint he started to shake him up in advance with harsh words and threats, calling him unjust and traitor (προδοτήν), and enemy of the emperors (καὶ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐχθρόν. 90, 89A).

To the judge’s question as to what may have been the defendant’s treason, the accuser replied that “he had delivered great cities, like Alexandria and Egypt and Pentapolis which were part of our [the Byzantine] borders to the Saracens of whom he claimed to be much in favour and a most close friend!”<sup>69</sup>

One would have expected that if guilty as accused, Maximus as an ascetic would have defended his actions and made a public display of the reasons of his conduct; but he denied the accusation because, as his biographer has noted with a rhetorical question, “what would have been his profit from the conquests of cities for which he (always) wanted the best?”<sup>70</sup>

68    Dated May, 655; Sherwood, *Date-List*, p. 56, n. 89.

69    “ὡς εἶη πόλεις μεγάλας προδεδικώς, Ἀλεξάνδρειαν φημί καὶ Αἴγυπτον καὶ Πεντάπολιν, τῶν ἡμετέρων μὲν, φησὶν, ἀποσπάσας ὀρίων, τοῖς δὲ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἤδη προσθήμενος. ὦν καὶ τὰ μάλιστα εὐνοῦν αὐτὸν ἐκάλει, καὶ οἰκειότατον” (90, 89B); emphasis is ours. Cf. also above, note 34.

70    “τί γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ τῇ ἀλώσει τῶν πόλεων, αἷς μᾶλλον τὰ λυσιτελεῖ ἐβούλετο;” (90, 89B).

Another accusation levelled at Maximus was that while in Rome Maximus' disciple, Anastasius, was proclaiming on behalf of Maximus that it is neither proper nor reasonable for anyone to call the emperor a priest;<sup>71</sup> a seemingly substantive accusation which questioned the established emperor's right to have part in the domain of doctrine. Maximus rebuffed this accusation saying that the context of such statements had to do with the *Tomos* of Union (92B), discussed in Alexandria in 633, and with the universal principle that matters pertinent to the definition and investigation of doctrine are the prerogative of those ordained to priesthood, not of the kings; a principle which, according to Maximus, is valid at all times.<sup>72</sup>

### 10 The *Relatio Motionis* (PG 90, 109C–129D)

This part of the *Acta* expands on the trial itself. Maximus is accused from the beginning as having advised Peter, governor of Numidia, not to obey the order of the emperor to advance to Egypt with troops against the Arabs, his reasoning being that God is not inclined to assist the Roman state while Heraclius and his family were in power. The text of the trial reveals also the deep emotions which the Monothelite controversy had bred. Here is the exchange between the “sakellarios” and “elder”<sup>73</sup> Maximus:

“Are you a Christian?” He replied, “By the grace of Christ the God of the universe I am a Christian.” The former said, “That is not true!” The servant

71 “μη̄ ὄσιον εἶναι μηδ' εὐλογον ἱερέα τὸν βασιλέα καλεῖσθαι” (90, 92A).

72 “τὸ ὀρίζεσθαι περὶ δογματῶν καὶ ζητεῖν ἱερέων μᾶλλον ἢ βασιλέων ἐστὶ” (92C). Cf. an extended version of this particular accusation, in the *Relatio Motionis*, PG 90, 113D–117D. John of Damascus used very similar words and style to speak against Leo III's interference with matters of doctrine with regard to the icons “... βασιλέων ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτικὴ εὐπραξία· ἡ δὲ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κατάστασις, ποιμένων καὶ διδασκάλων ... οὐ δέχομαι βασιλέα τυραννικῶς τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἀρπάζοντα”. PG 94, 1301D–1304A; cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, p. 12. For a more recent discussion and bibliography on the priestly nature of the Byzantine emperor, see G. Ostrogorsky, “The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchical World Order”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 35 (1956), pp. 1–14; Fr. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine political philosophy. Origins and background*, vol. 2. (Washington 1966), pp. 643–6; D. Nicol, “Byzantine Political Thought” in: *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (ed. J.H. Burns) (Cambridge 1988), pp. 51–79, especially pp. 67–73; for bibliography on the subject, see *ibidem*, pp. 696–703; G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: étude sur le “césaropapisme” byzantin* (Paris 1995), esp. p. 145; G.P. Majeska, “The Emperor in His Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia” in: *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (ed. H. Maguire). (Washington, D.C. 1997), pp. 1–11.

73 PG 90, 109C.

of God<sup>74</sup> answered, “You say I am not, but God says I am and will remain a Christian.” “But how,” he said, “if you are a Christian, can you hate the emperor?” The servant of God answered, “And how can this be evident? For hatred is a hidden disposition of the soul, just as love is.” And he said to him, “From what you have done it has become clear to everyone that you hate the emperor and his realm. For you alone betrayed Egypt and Alexandria and Pentapolis and Tripoli and Africa to the Saracens.” “And what is the proof of these things?”, he asked. They brought forward John, who became sakellarios<sup>75</sup> of Peter, the general of Numidia in Africa, who said, “Twenty-two years ago the grandfather of the emperor [of the present day Constans II (641–68)] ordered venerable Peter to take an army and go off into Egypt against the Saracens, and he wrote to you as if he were speaking to a servant of God, having information that you were a holy man, to inquire whether you would advise him to set out. And you wrote back to him and said not to do such a thing because God was not pleased to lend aid to the Roman state under the emperor Heraclius and his family.” The servant of God said, “If you are telling the truth, then you surely have both Peter’s letter to me and mine to him. Let them be brought forth and I shall be subject to the punishments prescribed in the law.” But he said, “I do not have the letter; nor do I even know if he ever wrote one to you. But everyone in the camp [φοσάτων] spoke of these things to each other at the time.” The servant of God said to him, “If the whole camp talked about this, why are you the only one to libel me? Have you ever seen me, or I you?” And he answered, “Never.” Then turning toward the senate the servant of God said, “Judge for yourselves if it is just to have such accusers or witnesses brought forward. ‘By the judgement you judge you shall be judged, and by the measure that you measure it shall be measured unto you,’ says the God of all (Mt. 7:2).”<sup>76</sup>

The accusation of treason “twenty-two years ago” is actually unfounded because, as we noted above, Maximus wrote to Peter in Egypt when the *strategos* had already proceeded to Alexandria. Also the record of the Arab conquest of Egypt and North Africa is completely different from the simplistic and exaggerated one presented at the trial. A traditional source lays emphasis that the

74 The use of the expression “servant of God” (more familiar in Arabic, *‘abd Allāh*), rather than “elder”, or “the saint”, is interesting here to note. Does it betray an Arabic influence and a later date of the text of the trial?

75 “finance minister”, according to G.C. Berthold’s *Maximus Confessor. Selected Writings* (London 1985), p. 17.

76 Adapted partially from Berthold’s *Maximus Confessor*, pp. 17–8.

general ‘Amr b. al-‘As had difficulty in convincing caliph ‘Umar to proceed with the conquest of Egypt, especially since the conquest of Syria under Khalid b. al-Walid was still in process. A more modern interpretation of events is that the caliph did give his consent as part of his general plan of conquests. Although an able negotiator and diplomat, al-‘As, who had been in Egypt on trade while still a pagan, as a general was no match to Khalid b. al-Walid. However, the Christological conflicts and the oppressive policy of Byzantium, through its patriarch and civil governor of Egypt, Cyrus (630–642),<sup>77</sup> imposed on Egypt for ten years since its reconquest from the Persians, made its fall to the Arabs an easy mission. John, the Monophysite bishop of Nikiou, an incomplete and admittedly not so friendly a source towards the Byzantines,<sup>78</sup> remarks:

And when the Moslem saw the weakness of the Romans and the hostility of the people to the emperor Heraclius, because of the persecution wherewith he had visited all the land of Egypt in regard to the Orthodox faith [i.e. Monophysitism, or the non-Chalcedonian faith], at the instigation of Cyrus the Chalcedonian patriarch, they became bolder and stronger in the war.<sup>79</sup>

‘Amr b. al-‘As appeared in the Delta at the end of 639 with a small force of barely four thousand horsemen. Therefore in 633, the year of Peter’s advance to Alexandria, there was no immediate threat from the Arabs. The resistance that al-‘As encountered in 639 was minimal. He occupied al-Farama

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77 A former bishop of Phasis in the Caucasus and for this so-called Caucasian, is known in the Arabic sources as “Muqawqis”. F. Gabrielli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam* (New York 1968), p. 170.

78 H. Zotenberg, ed. tr., *Chronique de Jean évêque de Nikiou* (Paris 1883), translated by R.H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John (c. 690 AD), Coptic Bishop of Nikiu, from Zotenberg’s Ethiopic Text* (London and Oxford 1916). Italian translation by A. Carile, “Giovanni di Nikiou, cronista bizantinocopto del VII secolo”, in: *Byzantium. Tribute to Andreas N. Stratos*, vol. II (Athens 1986), pp. 353–398. The references here are from the English translation. Originally written in Coptic and translated to Ethiopic from where Zotenberg’s translation. The Chronicle of John, Coptic bishop of Nikiou and “rector” of the bishops of Upper Egypt presents a thirty year gap of the period from the accession of Heraclius to the imperial throne to the appearance of the Arabs before Babylon, Egypt, i.e. of the years from 610 to 640, the period which is of our special interest here! Its sources are John Malalas, John of Antioch, and the Chronicon Paschale. John of Nikiou had his own reasons in describing bloody conflicts between the Christians and the Muslim Arabs; he wanted to show how the theological feuds among the Christians and the injustices of the Byzantines against the Christian population of Egypt were the cause of divine punishment.

79 Ch. 115.9, p. 184.

(Pelousion) in the early 640. He avoided attacking Alexandria directly. He proceeded instead towards the fortress of Babylon (Bābilyūn) near present-day Cairo. The only important encounter took place at Heliopolis near Babylon where the emperor's general Theodore was defeated in Rajab 219/July 640.<sup>80</sup> After the fall of Babylon Patriarch Cyrus began peace negotiations, something which infuriated the emperor who recalled him to Constantinople on Easter Day (640), disowned and banished him as traitor.<sup>81</sup> It was only after Heraclius' death, February 10, 641 and the surrender of Babylon (Rabī'a 21 20/9 April 641) that Cyrus was able to conclude a treaty with al-'As (September 641). Heraclius died before the conquest of Alexandria. Constantine, his successor, who had promised to send help, soon fell ill and died. His reign lasted only one hundred days! As a result, John of Nikiou remarks pointedly, "the people mocked Heraclius and his son Constantine".<sup>82</sup> Theodosius<sup>83</sup> and Anastasius moved then to the city of On to attack 'Amr b. al-'As. After the fall of Babylon, 'Amr proceeded slowly to the capital Alexandria. Convinced that the Arabs could not be defeated, and wanting to head the Alexandrian Church under Arab domination away from Byzantine control, Cyrus appeared now more conciliatory towards the clergy which he had previously oppressed. The Alexandrians reacted violently against the treaty but Cyrus managed to persuade them to accept it. He himself, however, did not enjoy what he had hoped for; he died in March 642. In September of the same year the Greek garrison evacuated Alexandria, as agreed, and the inhabitants started paying tribute to the Arabs in return for their lives.<sup>84</sup>

80 John of Nikiou mentions two Byzantine generals, Theodosius and Anastasius, whom he calls "governors". They were some twelve miles away fortifying the citadel of Babylon. They responded by sending general Leontius to Abuit. John presents the conquest of Egypt not as an easy enterprise for the Arabs. As he writes, "Amr the chief of the Moslem spent twelve months in warring against the Christians of Northern Egypt, but failed, nevertheless, in reducing their cities". Ch. 115.9, p. 184.

81 Cf. Gabrielli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, pp. 170–1. John of Nikiou puts the matter differently. The purpose of Cyrus' recall to Constantinople was for the emperor to have "a counsel with him" as to the course of action with regard to the Arabs "that he should fight, if he were able, but, if not, should pay tribute". He also ordered that Theodore come to Constantinople and leave Anastasius "to guard the city of Alexandria and the cities of the coast". Ch. 116.8, p. 185–6.

82 Ch. 116.9, p. 186.

83 John of Nikiou calls the Byzantine general, Theodore, Theodosius; an easy confusion of two names of the same meaning.

84 Alexandria fell in 643, according to I.M. Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge 1990), p. 39.

The Arab occupation of Egypt was accomplished rather peacefully; so was that of Pentapolis (Cyrenaica, called Barqa by the Arabs, 643).<sup>85</sup> The subjugation of North Africa took another seventy five years (711). 'Amr had succeeded in occupying Egypt with negotiations rather than with military means alone. But the court of Heraclius, puzzled by the whole affair of the rise of the Arabs and embittered by the loss of Syria, was seeing the thread of the Arabs and the shadows of treason everywhere. This is not a strange or novel state of mind!

An intriguing question in this excursus is, Who was this sakellarios, the accuser of Maximus? All indications seem to point to Theodore, the imperial secretary who in Maximus' *ep.* 12 to John the Chamberlain is mentioned as carrying letters from Martina to George the eparch of Africa.<sup>86</sup> Another person at the time by the name Theodore is the general who was defeated by al-'As at Heliopolis. *Sakellarios* is certainly a title of political and ecclesiastical office higher than that of a letter carrier.<sup>87</sup> But the circumstances warranted a high profile figure to carry such a sensitive message and order. A person of the court can also be considered as one of the sycophants against whom Maximus warns John the Chamberlain in *ep.* 45.<sup>88</sup> This may very well be one of Heraclius' confidants, the general whom 'Amr b. al-'As defeated at Heliopolis in July 640. The remark of Maximus' biographer that this was an "ill-named Sakellarios" points to both, a sycophant and a Theodore who is anything but a "gift from God". We are inclined to suggest that this may be the same person with sakellarios, the carrier of Heraclius' letter with an order also to oppose militarily the Arabs. Defeated badly by al-'As in Heliopolis in 640, thus opening for the Arabs the way to Alexandria (642) and Pentapolis (643) which was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria, and now (in May 655) in his eighties, he fabricates a story against Maximus related to Peter's dispatch to Egypt in 633 and making Maximus the cause of all subsequent developments; an event to which at his fifty-eighth year he was probably an eye and ear witness. A problem in this identification may be posed by the texts. In the *Relatio Motionis* the sakellarios refers to Maximus as someone who "hates the king" ("Καὶ πῶς ... εἰ μισεῖς τὸν βασιλέα;" 112A), which implies that Heraclius was still alive; while in the *vita* he refers to Maximus as "an enemy of the kings" (καὶ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐχθρόν,

85 In fact it was not until the year 27/647 that a Muslim army destroyed the forces of patriarch Gregory, at Sufetula (the modern Sbeitla, in Tunisia). L.V. Vaglieri, "The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates", in: *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A (ed. P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton, B. Lewis) (Cambridge 1970), pp. 57–103, at 63.

86 Cf. above #5.

87 Cf. N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris 1972), 251<sup>20</sup>, 312.

88 Cf. above # 8.



90:89A), which implies Martina and her co-emperors. But this discrepancy can be explained in the following way: that in each case the accuser refers to a different incident, in the first instance to 633 and to Maximus' alleged bad advice to Peter, and in the second to 641 and to Maximus' support of George's disregard of the imperial letter. In both instances Maximus is accused of disobedience against imperial authority. The case, however, may also be that it was actually Heraclius who had sent the letter to George, eparch of Africa, who, by the time Theodore arrived in Egypt, had died. The rapid sequence of events is even reflected in the confusion of the record of the trial. What the record, however, does not seem to obscure is the traumatized and schizophrenic psychological state of the Byzantine court as a result of the Arab conquests and the factor of Islam.

## The Seventh Century in the Byzantine-Muslim Relations: Characteristics and Forces

The Byzantine relations to Islam, as I have indicated elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> is a complex phenomenon, still waiting to be described. The study so far has been either general, admirably attempting to cover the whole spectrum of history from the seventh to the fifteenth century and even later, or particular of selective author and literature of polemic-apologetic nature.<sup>2</sup> Reconstructing the whole picture of the phenomenon of Byzantine society vis-à-vis Islam, and in contradistinction to that of the West, is a long process which will require the expertise of many scholars for the years to come and, then, in various configurations depending on the sources and the angle from which each one looks at them. My intention here is to outline the *dynamics* or the *forces* behind, and to identify some of the underlying *phenomena* which characterize the Byzantine-Muslim relations during their first century; rather than to retell the story of the conquests, which, after all, did not start with the beginning nor did they end with the close of the seventh century.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 "The Art and Non-Art of Byzantine Polemics: Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine Anti-Islamic Literature", in *Conversion and Continuity. Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 55–73.
  - 2 Cf. e.g. Speros Vryonis, Jr., "Byzantium and Islam. Seventh-Seventeenth Century" in *Eastern European Quarterly* 2(1968)205–240, rpt. in his *Byzantium: Its Internal History and Relations with the Muslim World* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1971) No. 9; and Adel Théodore Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972).
  - 3 The literature on the history of the earliest Arab conquests, which involves primarily Byzantine territories, is well-known and too extensive to be mentioned here. On the Byzantine reaction to the Arab conquests, see Alexander A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles, 1935, 1959); Walter E. Kaegi Jr., "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest", *Church History* 38 (1969), pp. 139–49, reprinted in his *Army, Society and Religion in Byzantium* 13 (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982); John Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions", *Byzantion* 51 (1981), pp. 579–91; D.J. Constantelos, "The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek Sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries", *Byzantion* 42 (1972), pp. 325–57.

## 1 Rising Arab Consciousness, and Independence from Byzantium

The Byzantine reaction to Islam in the seventh century was affected and coloured by the make-up and the character of the Near East, which had enjoyed almost a thousand years of common (Graeco-Roman, Iranian, Semitic, and Egyptian) culture and history.<sup>4</sup> The Graeco-Roman and later mediaeval Hellenistic, or Byzantine, culture affected the Near East by association, rather than by having any indigenous roots of their own in it. The Greeks themselves were numerous in Asia Minor and the Balkans, but in Syria, including Palestine, they were present only in minorities. These provinces were Eastern and Arab in mentality and culture. This is an essential characteristic that needs to be born in mind when dealing with the reaction of the population to the Arab invasions and the spread of Islam in this region, especially during the earliest period.

The early decades of the seventh century are occupied by a struggle for domination between two non-Arab empires and world views: the Byzantine and the Persian.<sup>5</sup> Even the Arabs of the Peninsula who unlike the *foederati* ones, the Lakhmides and Ghassānids,<sup>6</sup> were not actively involved in this struggle, were aware of the ferocity and the implications of these wars. The Arabs found themselves caught in the middle of this struggle, without being torn by its demands. In fact, the Byzantine-Persian wars contributed to the rise of Arab consciousness and the sense of independence from either of them. Interestingly enough, the sense of the peninsular Arabs was to side ideologically, and ambiguously, with the Byzantines,<sup>7</sup> although they were the ones who eventually conquered back for themselves the areas (Palestine, Syria, Egypt up to Ethiopia, N. Africa, Asia Minor) which the Persians had taken from the Byzantines!<sup>8</sup> The earliest part of the seventh century, the period of incubation of the yet unborn Islam, is also the time of assertiveness of the Christian Arab self-consciousness, and of a rising sense of independence from the Greek Byzantium. The early part of the

4 Cf. Vryonis, "Byzantium", p. 206.

5 Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Carolus de Boor, vol. I (Lipsiae: 1883; 1963), in passim; subsequently cited as dB = *The Chronicle of Theophanes. An English translation of anni mundi 6095-6305 (AD 602-813), with introduction and notes*, by Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); subsequently cited as T =.

6 On the Arabs in the service of Byzantium or of Persia, see Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984), in passim.

7 Surah *ar-Rūm* (30:2-6). See below, n. 75.

8 Cf. dB = 301; T = 11 and dB = 302; T = 13.

seventh century is also dominated by the personality of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610–641), a crusader in character and policy. A mixture of political-military and religious fervour,<sup>9</sup> he undoubtedly contributed to the alienation of the Christians of the Eastern provinces from Byzantium itself. Such dissatisfaction with Byzantium and its rulers extended beyond the Christian community. The Jewish community of Antioch had earlier gone against the Christians (601)<sup>10</sup> and resisted the armies of emperor Phocas, whose reign (602–610) was marked by bloodshed and political intrigue.

The state of the Arab Christian population appears significantly inequitable to that of other Christians of the Byzantine Empire. Theophanes describes the state of those Arab Christians living on the borderline between Arabia and Syria in 632, the year of the death of Muhammad, in a telling way:

Some of the nearby Arabs received a small subsidy from the Emperor for guarding the mouths of the desert.<sup>11</sup> At that time a eunuch came to distribute the soldiers' wages. The Arabs came to get their pay, as was customary, but the eunuch drove them away, saying, "The Emperor pays his soldiers with difficulty; with how much more to such dogs as you?" The oppressed Arabs went to their fellow-tribesmen and showed them the route to the land of Gaza, which is the mouth of the desert from Mt. Sinai and is very rich.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, one may wonder what impression a Byzantine representative, and a eunuch, could have made upon the Arab tribesmen whose social virtues included generosity and manliness! The already weak buffer zone, which was maintained poorly and treated in a slavish way, collapsed. The roads to Sinai, Palestine and Egypt were now open to the Arab tribesmen. Such a state in the social structure did not apply only to the Arabs who lived in the fringes of the empire. As Irfan Shahīd has observed,

It is noteworthy that Arabs in the service of Byzantium do not come anywhere near the pinnacle reached by their predecessors in the

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9 Returning from Africa to face Emperor Phocas he entered the city of Constantinople as a crusader with icons of Theotokos prominently displayed on the masts of his towered ships dB = 298; T = 8. In another instance Theophanes speaks of Heraclius' "divine zeal" dB = 302; T = 13 and describes extensively his personal expedition against the Persians as real crusades dB = 303 ff; T = 13 ff.

10 dB = 296; T = 7.

11 *wadis*, or dry river beds.

12 dB = 335–6; T = 36.

Roman period, in spite of the important contributions they made to the Byzantine war effort in the fourth and sixth centuries.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the Muslim conquests, depending also on one's ecclesiastical allegiance, were seen by some as a deliverance from Byzantium, and they were welcomed as such. In the words of a later Syriac Christian historian,

the God of vengeance delivered us out of the hand of the Romans [*Rum*, i.e. the Byzantines] by means of the Arabs ... It profited us not a little to be saved from the cruelty of the Romans and their bitter hatred toward us.<sup>14</sup>

Such sentiments were expressed by Christians, mainly non-Chalcedonians. But even a Jewish apocalyptic writing of this period blesses God for having "brought the Kingdom of Ishmael" in order to save the Jews from the "wickedness" of Byzantium.<sup>15</sup>

The general reaction of the Christians to the Arab advance must have been a mixture of relief and overwhelming fear. In spite of the victory which Heraclius' brother Theodore had scored near Emessa (634) Heraclius himself, according to Theophanes, "had despaired and abandoned Syria; he took the precious wood [the cross of Christ] from Jerusalem and went off to Constantinople".<sup>16</sup> At times it was beneficial for the Byzantines to tolerate anomalies and an apparent loss for the sake of later greater gains, or for mere regrouping. In the case of Cyprus, for example, the Byzantines as well as the Arabs were well served politically to let the island remain neutral or, in fact, tied equally to and be exploited by both powers, demanding full attention or protection of neither. But was the abandonment of Syria and Palestine such a tactical manoeuvre on the part of Heraclius? If the case of Cyprus reflects an intentional *economia* (dispensation) of political calculations,<sup>17</sup> the case of Syria betrays Heraclius' own desperation. It was also an event which affected the Eastern Christian population existentially; and these were not only Monophysites

13 *Byzantium and the Arabs*, p. 518.

14 quoted by B. Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1960), p. 58.

15 *Ibid.*

16 dB = 337; T-37.

17 Cf. R. Browning, "Byzantium and Islam in Cyprus in the Early Middle Ages", *Ἐπετηρίς τοῦ Κέντρου Ἐπιστημονικῶν Σπουδῶν* (Nicosia) 9 (1977-1979) 101-116, at 114; rpt. in his *History, Language and Literacy in the Byzantine World* (Northampton: Variorum Reprints, 1989), No. III.

and Nestorians, but Chalcedonians as well.<sup>18</sup> The Christians were left abandoned and, more so, hurt having also lost the cross of Christ, their symbol of hope. Those who felt more desolate were particularly the non-Greek speaking who had no reason to flee before the Arab conquerors and who remained in the conquered towns and countryside while most of the Greek speaking fled with the retreating Byzantine army. Al-Balādhurī reports that when the Muslims entered Damascus, Aleppo, Bālis and Qāsīrīn they found vacant houses.<sup>19</sup> There seems to be a different assessment of the conquests by the authorities of Byzantium and by the indigenous leadership. Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem (c.550–638), for example, who coined the Arab conquests as “a Saracen disorder and destructive revolt”<sup>20</sup> and presented the conquests and the siege of Jerusalem to his flock as God’s temporal punishment for their unfaithfulness and moral misconduct, knew that they were a “revolt” with permanent political and religious repercussions. It was then the unresponsiveness of Heraclius to the desperate siege of Jerusalem which led the aged Patriarch to deliver the city to ‘Umar (638). For Heraclius the Arab invasions were, perhaps, a temporal setback and an inconsequential event: if the Persians had been beaten, so would be the Saracens. The indigenous Christians, however, proved to be more perceptive.

With the Arab conquests neither the Sassanian nor the Byzantine flavours were for ever lost in the region;<sup>21</sup> the presence of both as authorities and political institutions were. In fact, the influence of the Byzantine culture upon various aspects of Muslim society<sup>22</sup> made now life for the Christians of the Near East more congenial. As a result of the emergence of Islam and the conquests

18 Cf. S.P. Brock, “Syriac views of emergent Islam”, in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), pp. 9–21.

19 *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1866), pp. 123, 147, 150. Cf. also Nehemia Levtzion, “Conversion to Islam in Syria and Palestine and the Survival of Christian Communities”, in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islam. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Gervers et. als. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies), pp. 292–3.

20 Christmas Sermon (634); text edited by H. Usener, “Weihnachtspredigt des Sophronios”, *Reinische Museum für Philologie* 41 (1886) 500–516; rpt. by Ioannis Phokylides, in *Ἐκκλησιαστικός Φάρος* (Alexandria) 17 (1918), pp. 371–386.

21 “The Arab conquest was not destructive; the older societies survived the conquest intact, violent disruption having been limited to the political apex. That is to say that the Sassanid monarchy came to an end and the Byzantine emperor lost control of Egypt, Syria and North Africa”. Vryonis, “Byzantium and Islam”, pp. 209–210.

22 In a succinct and comprehensive manner, Vryonis has discussed such influences upon the nature of the caliphate, the administration and economic life, the Arabic language, urban life, painting, architecture, music and law. “Byzantium and Islam”, pp. 210–223.

their life became more Arab, while retaining its Byzantine flavour. The causes themselves of non-destruction speak on our topic of the rising Arab identity and independence from Byzantium: a) The Christians of the Near East valued deeply their Arab culture; b) major cities, rather than resisting, were capitulated to the Muslims and, thus, saved from destruction; c) Islam as a religion was basically ignored or, at best, treated as a Christian heresy; d) the Christians were in the majority and formed the most advanced and better qualified segment of society.

By the end of the seventh century the Arab Christians, who at the beginning had formed the backbone of the Muslim administration, became undesirable to the rulers; something which points to two developments: to the political, administrative and economic emancipation of the Muslim administration from the Byzantine fold (indicated by numismatic and linguistic innovations), and the awareness by the Christians of this new Arab-Muslim administration by the Christians as an alien and occupying force. The separation of the two communities along differing religious lines was the result of a progressive and mutual development. Arabic replaced Greek as the language of the administration and state registries, while Greek continued to be the elite language of the Christians, which was even intensified as a vehicle of self expression, and a distinct one at that.<sup>23</sup>

In the seventh century Byzantium was suffering from the nausea of discontent of its Eastern provinces, and from the pains of its own shrinking from the over expansion which had experienced during the reign of Justinian I (527–565).<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the Arabs expansion served as an expression of solidarity and of the rising Arab consciousness; an expression which, coincidentally, contributed directly to the process of Byzantine contraction.

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23 Consider the liturgical and spiritual renewal taking place in major monastic centres, such as Mar Sabbas, as well as the case of John of Damascus writing in Greek and even codifying the faith, spirituality, worship and practice of Christianity as a way of crystalizing it for preservation. Daniel J. Sahas, "The Arab character of the Christian disputation with Islam, The case of John of Damascus (c.655–c.749)", in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden 1992), pp. 185–205. See Chapter 21 in this volume.

24 Balkans, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, coast of N. Africa, S. Spain, Sicily, a large part of Italy.

## 2 Christological Divergence and Consolidation of Islam

Byzantine society was preoccupied with religion, and the seventh-century Middle East torn by doctrinal strife. Not only internal, but even external political events were interpreted in religious terms: Islam was a Christian “heresy”; the Muslims were Arians, Nestorians or simply “atheists”; the invasions constituted a “punishment of God”; events in history and natural phenomena were interpreted as eschatological signs in an apocalyptic language.

New doctrinal controversies on issues lingering from the Council of Chalcedon (451), such as Monothelitism and Monoenergytism, became the cause of greater division and turmoil within the Christian community. Involved in these controversies were officials, as well as theologically sophisticated monks and ascetics. On the Monothelite-Monoenergytic side stood Emperor Heraclius himself, and the Patriarchs Cyrus of Alexandria (630–643), Sergius of Constantinople (610–638), and Honorius of Rome (625–638); while on the Dyothelite side which represented the Chalcedonian Orthodox theology stood intellectual monks and ascetics of the like of John Moschus (ca. 550–619), Sophronius (550–638), later Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Maximus the Confessor (580–662).

Heraclius’ theological policy, especially on the issue of Monothelitism-Monoenergytism, played into the hands of “Syrian [Monophysite] knavery” in the person of Athanasius, the Patriarch of the Jacobites, with the consent of Sergius, the Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Byzantine involvement in the doctrinal controversies flourishing in the Eastern provinces was more dividing than uniting the feuding parties; something which contributed further to the alienation of the vastly non-Chalcedonian Christians of Syria, Palestine and Egypt from the Chalcedonian Orthodox of Byzantium. Interestingly enough, Byzantium at the time was not as acute to the Chalcedonian theology as Palestinian Christianity was, especially in the person of Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the elite of the monastic community.<sup>26</sup> Sophronius spent most part of his life in trying to convince the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Pope of Rome, and the Patriarch of Alexandria of the heretical basis of the union between Monophysites and Chalcedonians which Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria had wrought on the premise of the monothelite compromise. In fact, the only Church which officially adhered to the theology of Chalcedon

25 Cf. dB = 329; T = 31 f.

26 Cf. dB-330; T = 32.



during the time, a time which coincides with the first wave of Muslim invasions and the fall of Jerusalem, proved to be that of Jerusalem!<sup>27</sup>

The scars left from the doctrinal conflicts had weakened the ability of the opposing camps to come to terms with each other. Both fell as an easy prey to the advancing Arabs whose diversified tribes had, ironically, found unity for the first time in their history in religion, Islam!

Rekindling of Monophysitism with the Monothelite controversies, contemporary to the emergence of Islam, sharpened the difference between Christianity and Islam as monotheistic religions. Represented also by indigenous and Arabic speaking Christians, Monophysite Christianity provided a greater contrast and a stronger impetus to the monarchian Islam. The Qur'ān reflects, more directly, a rejection of Monophysite-Monothelite Christianity.<sup>28</sup> Although one cannot say that Islam subscribed to the Chalcedonian Orthodox theology, it appears more directly and openly opposing Monophysitism which, seen by Muhammad as the official Christianity represented by most Arabic speaking Christians, understated the *human* nature of Christ and thus, for Islam, the human reality of a prophet. Thus, primitive Islam needs to be studied not only in the context of the Syro-Palestinian and Egyptian monasticism, but also in the context of the Orthodox-Monophysite/Monothelite controversy. The whole notion of Islam as "a Christian heresy" takes a different meaning under the light and the realities of the seventh century.

The Monothelite controversies played a significant role in the success of the Muslim invasions. Here is how Theophanes connects the two:

At the same time as the church was being harassed by the Emperors and their impious priests,<sup>29</sup> the desolate Amalek rose up to smite us, Christ's people.<sup>30</sup> The first fearful fall of the Roman army came to pass: I mean the one at Gabitha, the Yarmuk, and Dathesmos. After this the fall of

27 Cf. dB = 330 f; T = 31ff.

28 E.g. surah *al-Ma'idah* (5:116), *an-Nahl* (16:51), *an-Nisā* (4:157,171) and especially *al-Tawhīd* (112). Of the many studies on this popular subject, see Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: an exploration* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Michel Hayek, *Le Christ de l'Islam; textes présentés, traduits et annotés* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959); Henri Michaud, *Jésus selon le Coran* (Neuchâtel: Éditions Delachaux et Niestlé, 1960); E.G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965); and for more, Don Wismer, *The Islamic Jesus: An annotated bibliography of sources in French and English* (New York: Garland Publications, 1977).

29 Implied here are the Patriarchs and the Pope who inclined to Monothelitism.

30 The phrase "the Amalek of the desert (Theophanes has used the adjective *eremicos* figuratively and in the superlative as *eremikotatos*, most desolate) rose up to smite us, the people of Christ" is identical to and, perhaps, copied from Anastasius Sinaites (c.640–700);

Palestine, Caesarea, and Jerusalem came one after the other, then the ruin of Egypt, the capture of the Mediterranean, its islands, and all Romania, the final destruction of the Roman expedition and army in Phoenicia, and the devastation of all Christian peoples and places, which did not cease until the tormentor of the church<sup>31</sup> was wickedly killed.<sup>32</sup>

While most Chalcedonian writers who treated the Arab invasions as a temporary phenomenon, interpreted their success as God's punishment for the iniquities, injustice and the general laxity of the Christians,<sup>33</sup> others (especially Monophysites and Monothelites) explained them as the result of what they considered to be the Chalcedonian heresy, as well of the arrogance and the persecution they suffered under Heraclius.<sup>34</sup> Still others (particularly the Nestorians) saw them as a punishment for the Monophysite success in northern Mesopotamia and a defeat of Zoroastrianism.<sup>35</sup> John of Nikiou (late 7th c), for example, born during the Muslim invasion of Egypt, later Monophysite bishop and "rector" of the bishops of Upper Egypt, wrote a *Chronicle* describing the Muslim invasion of Egypt in some detail to show mainly that the Arab conquest was God's judgement for the heresy into which the Empire fell by accepting the doctrine of Chalcedon.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the moral and theological reasons there was also enough political blame to be thrown around. Maximus the Confessor, a Chalcedonian, was accused that "he alone betrayed Egypt and Alexandria and Pentapolis and Tripoli and Africa to the Saracens" because of his opposition to the Monothelites!<sup>37</sup>

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*Hodegos*, PG 89:1156C. Cf. also, Sidney H. Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987), pp. 341–358, at 345.

31 Meaning Constans II who was assassinated in Sicily in 668.

32 dB = 332; T = 34.

33 Anastasius Sinaites, a staunch Chalcedonian Orthodox, ascribed the Byzantine defeat at Yarmuk, the loss of Syria and Egypt and the naval disaster at Phoenix [Cf. Theophanes, dB = 345–6, T = 45] to the prevalence of heresy [monothelitism] in high places. Kaegi has discussed Anastasius' view of the Arab conquests in his study "Initial Byzantine Reactions ...", # 13 in *Army, Society and Religion in Byzantium*; see above, n. 3.

34 Michael the Syrian, *Histoire Universelle*, 4 vols., ed. J.B. Chabot (Paris, 1899–1924); vol. 2, XI, VII, 422; XI, VIII, 430.

35 Cf. Brock, "Syriac views", in passim; esp. p. 20.

36 *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiou*, translated from Zotenberg's Ethiopic Text by R.H. Charles (Oxford: William and Norgate, 1916) pp. 116, 120.

37 *Maximus Confessor Selected Writings*, tr. with notes by George C. Berthold (*The Classics of Western Spirituality*. London: SPCK, 1985), p. 17. Robert Devreesse, "La vie de S. Maxime le Confesseur et ses recensions", *Analecta Bollandiana* 46 (1928), pp. 5–49. For a Syriac *Vita*, see Sebastian Brock, "An early Syriac life of Maximus the Confessor", *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973), pp. 299–346. Exactly a century later John of Damascus was condemned, also

In Maximus' trial (late 654 or early 655) the persecutor accused him that he had provided no help to Peter, the general of Emperor Constans II (641–668), against the Muslims with the excuse that God, anyway, was not going to support the forces of Heraclius' family. The text of the trial<sup>38</sup> betrays the bitterness of the Byzantine officials for the loss of the Eastern provinces and their search for a scapegoat from among Dyothelite Orthodox, such as Maximus. It reveals also the deep emotions which the Monothelite controversy caused between the Constantinopolitan and the Christians of the Eastern provinces. What the text of the trial allows us also to gather is how the Monothelite controversies facilitated the process of the invasion and what a traumatic impact the Arab conquests made upon the imperial Constantinople.

The Christian community in the seventh century was much too preoccupied with its own doctrinal division and recrimination to have been able to notice Islam as another religion, especially since its stand on several issues resembled that of several contemporary Christian groups.

### 3 Christian Awareness of Islam, or Lack of It

The Byzantines, being generally of an advanced culture, saw the Arab Muslims as uncultured, arrogant, war-mongers<sup>39</sup> and atheists.<sup>40</sup> I am not aware, however, of any contemporary Greek source sensing and portraying them as successors or replacements of Byzantium. This notion is found in the Arabic literature, as well as in the Syriac literature.<sup>41</sup> In fact, as we mentioned earlier, the conquests were seen by the Christians as a temporal situation, until

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in council (754), among others as a "conspirator against the Empire", obviously with the loss of the Eastern provinces in mind! Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 4–5.

38 Berthold, pp. 17–18.

39 The expression "Arabian wolves" is employed to indicate the ferocity of the conquests. Cf. Hélène Ahrweiler, "L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes (VII<sup>e</sup>–IX<sup>e</sup> siècles)", *Revue Historique* 227.1 (1962), pp. 1–32, at 1, n. 2. Rpr. in her *Études sur les structures administrative et sociales de Byzance*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1971, # 1x.

40 Theophanes calls them in one instance "deniers of Christ" (dB = 353; T = 52) and in the same place, twice, "God's enemies"; but he is a later source. By 672/3, when the references occur, the Arabs had conquered most of the land of the Eastern provinces and controlled much of the Mediterranean. For Theophanes there is, therefore, a theological implication in the names. The second name makes sense as Theophanes speaks of the Arab movement against Constantinople; Arab, vis-à-vis Byzantine theocracy! The destruction of the Arab fleet in Constantinople is attributed by Theophanes to "the aid of God and His mother". dB = 354; T = 52–3.

41 Brock, "Syriac views", 14ff.

Christians come back to their senses and return to the right faith and conduct. The fact that the most striking influence of Byzantium upon the Muslims was on the imperialization of the caliphate shows, in reverse, the attraction which the administration and the advanced style of life of the Byzantines made upon the earliest Muslims. The Byzantines were not being replaced by, but rather Byzantinizing the Arabs. As Vryonis remarks, "It is obvious that the road from the court of Abu Bakr to that of Harun ar-Rashid proceeded via the courts of Heraclius and Chosroes".<sup>42</sup> All these give credence to the story which al-Tabarī relates about Mu'āwiya, that when Mu'āwiya was criticised for having adopted the foreign ways of Byzantine emperors and Persian shahs, he replied that "Damascus was full of Greeks and that none would believe in his power if he did not behave and look like an emperor".<sup>43</sup>

Sophronius, according to Theophanes and unlike what Eutychius says, was shocked at the uncared for appearance of 'Umar: "In truth, this<sup>44</sup> is the abomination of the desolation established in the holy place, which Daniel the prophet spoke of";<sup>45</sup> although other sources portray 'Umar as a pious and religious man who asks the aged Patriarch for a place to pray and who then gives Sophronius rights and privileges over Christian sites and holy places.<sup>46</sup> Most of the narratives also in John Moschus' *Leimon* where Arabs are mentioned allude to them with some fear and enmity, although not yet with the same strong language ("wild beasts in human form") which Maximus the Confessor used.<sup>47</sup> The Christians knew of Arab as "Saracens" and "Hagarenes", tribesmen raiding Christian communities. The names assumed a pejorative sense on the

42 Vryonis, "Byzantium and Islam", 211.

43 Cf. O. Grabar, "Islamic Art and Byzantium", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), p. 88; and dB = 347, T = 47.

44 "this" may be read here as implying the event of the fall of Jerusalem, 'Umar being seen as the personification of its predicament.

45 Daniel 9:27; 1 Maccabees 1:54; 6:7; dB = 339; T = 39.

46 Cf. dB = 343; T = 42. Eutychius, *Chronography*, PG 111:907–1156 (in Latin). Ioannis Phokylides, "Η ὁπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου ἀνακαλυφθεῖσα Ἀραβικὴ ἐπιγραφή", *Nea Sion* (Jerusalem) 10 (1910), pp. 262–268, at 263–4. Andreas N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. 11 (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert Publ., 1972), pp. 81–3. F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) pp. 151–2, 322 (nn. 287, 288). On the treaty or treaties between 'Umar and Sophronius, see A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, vol. 111 (1897; rpt. Bruxelles, 1963), pp. 123–333; D.C. Dennett Jr., *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 62–4.

47 PG 91:540. Cf. Henry Chadwick, "John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist", *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974), pp. 41–74, at 62; rpt. in his *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982) No. xviii.

basis of a tradition going back to Eusebius and Sozomen,<sup>48</sup> and this stereotype was reinforced by the Arab expansion.

Christians of the region were initially dealing with “Saracens”,<sup>49</sup> rather than with “Muslims”.<sup>50</sup> The Arabs are mostly referred to as Arabs, and frequently as Saracens and Hagarenes; names familiar in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (or at least this is how they were interpreted),<sup>51</sup> which made the Arabs and their religion kin to the family of Abraham!

John of Nikiou calls the Muslims “Moslems” and “Ishmaelites”.<sup>52</sup> Anastasius Sinaïtes, who wrote almost nothing about Islam, speaks only of Arabs,<sup>53</sup> and the “Amalek from the desert who has recently arisen, to smite us, the people of Christ”.<sup>54</sup> There is hardly any reference to the faith and practice of the Arabs as Muslims. Actual accounts or polemics of Islam took some one hundred years to come into being.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the preoccupation with the conquests and the ignorance of the particulars of Islam as a distinct religion, other reasons which may

48 Cf. Brock, “Syriac views”, 15.

49 This is the most common appellation of Bedouin tribes and consequently of the Muslims of Sinai found in the Narrations of the Sinaitic monks under the name Anastasius. F. Nau “Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai”, *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), pp. 58–89; and “Le texte grec des récits utiles à l’âme d’Anastase (le Sinaïte)”, *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903), pp. 56–90.

50 This is the evidence of Sophronius of Jerusalem (550–638).

51 The first writer that I know who intentionally interpreted the names Saracens, Hagarenes and Ishmaelites in a pejorative way and with reference to Biblical history is John of Damascus. Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 70–1.

52 *Chronicle*, in passim.

53 Griffith’s suggestion that, Anastasius under the designation “Greeks and Arabs” might actually imply one and the same thing, “pagan Arabs”, is intriguing although not entirely convincing. “Anastasios of Sinai”, 345–6. Anastasius does acknowledge the Arabs, however vaguely, as believers in God. In the *Treatise against the Jews* Anastasius seems to be aware of the Muslim claim of precedence over the sons of Abraham from Isaac, that is the Jews. PG 89:1256B–C. Narrations, however, under the name of Anastasius of Sinai, who must be another Sinaitic monk under the same name and almost contemporary to the previous Anastasius, (cf. S. Sakkos, *Περὶ Ἀναστασίων Σιναιτῶν*, Thessalonike, 1964), refer most likely to Muslims as “the present nation” that “polluted and defiled completely” Sinai. F. Nau, “Le texte grec”, *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), p. 61; and Sakkos, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

54 PG 89:1156C.

55 There may be some validity in John C. Lamoreaux’ suggestion that there seem to be three distinct stages of Byzantine response to Islam, (I) a homiletic stage, which saw the Muslim conquests as punishment for Christian sins and heresies, (II) an apocalyptic stage, which understood the conquests to be ushering in the end of the world, and (III) a polemic stage, which for the first time began to treat Islam as a rival religion. “Christian Polemics Against Islam: Why Did it Take Over One Hundred Years for Them to Come Into Being?” North American Patristic Society 1990 annual meeting (Abstracts, pp. 9 and 16).

explain somewhat the phenomenon of delayed polemics are the facts of the Byzantinization of the early caliphate to which we referred earlier and the cultural affinity between Arabs and Christians in the Eastern provinces. The latter made Christians and Muslims see each other more similar than dissimilar.

Any early reaction to Islam was one of amazement and contempt: amazement at its simplicity and lack of sophistication; contempt for its ethics on matters of sexual conduct. Islam was known more for its Christology, rather than for its Theology. If the Muslims were branded as “atheists” it was because, dictated by the Qur’ān, they denied the divinity of Jesus; not because they were thought that they did not believe in God. The Muslim defiance of the Christian religion was noticed and gauged not on the basis of doctrinal definitions, but on the basis of a defiance of such Christian practices, such as the veneration of icons and of the cross, which reminded the Muslims of idolatry.

On the other hand the Christians were impressed by the intensity with which Muslims expressed their faith, and by the grandeur with which they were manifesting it, through many mosques<sup>56</sup> some of imposing architectural design and technique; even when made with the hands of Christian craftsmen.<sup>57</sup> The original mosques in the conquered lands were a shared space in Christian churches (minus the cross and the icons), as in the earliest days of Christianity the synagogue continued to be the first house of worship! One may want to suggest that the theological awareness of the faith of each other was at a primitive stage, over-shadowed by the concern for finding ways of coexistence, or imposition of the one community upon the other.

#### 4 Apocalyptic Treatment of Islam

Arab resurgence was a much broader phenomenon than the conquests on themselves might suggest. I.M. Lapidus is right when he states that

56 ‘Umar’s piety is connected with and reflected in the number of mosques which the Muslims have attributed to him, or dedicated in his honour. They are called “Umarian” [*al-masajid al-‘Umaria*]. Archaeologist Clermont Ganneau has suggested that these were former Byzantine churches converted to mosques with the name of ‘Umar attached to them as a reminder of and a tribute to his conquests. Cf. *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (1897), p. 533; also *Recueil d’Archeologie Orientale* (1898), p. 302; *Quarterly Statements* (1901), p. 246. Cf. Phokylides “Ἡ ὀπισθοεὶν ...”, p. 268.

57 The Dome on the Rock in 691, the mosque of Damascus in 706, and the mosque of Medina in 706–10.

Arabian history is portrayed as chaotic until the rise of Islam. In terms of the history of the Middle East, the Arab conquests are taken as an historic accident, a diversion from the true course of Middle Eastern developments;

and when he suggests that,

we can improve our perspective on these matters, and better comprehend the rise of Islam and the conquests ... by considering the conquests as an integral part of the relationship between Arabia and the Middle Eastern societies.<sup>58</sup>

The rise of Islam ushered a new sense of Arab solidarity and order. Islam was equally a new religion, as it was a new social system and an expression of identity based on Arabism and Arab values. The conquests outside peninsular Arabia must be seen as part of the unification and consolidation process of the Arab tribes into a new integrated society, culture and world view which began with Muhammad. Already by the year 9 A.H. (630 AD) Muhammad had accepted the capitulation of the people of Ayla in the north-eastern extremity of Sinai, at the head of the Gulf of 'Aqaba.<sup>59</sup> This was a significant event, paradigmatic of Arab solidarity and convergence, and of the things to come.

58 "The Arab conquests and the formation of Islamic society", in G.H.A. Juynboll ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1982) pp. 49–72, at 49–50.

59 The city is also referred to as Aila, or Aylah. Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, (1956) 1972), p. 115, where the sources. The place is mentioned twice in the Narrations of "Anastasius Sinaites" (Nos. XII and XIX). It was a major centre as it was the seat of a bishop. Narration XIX mentions Abbas Sergius as "bishop of Ayla". Nau, "Le text grec", *OC* (1902), p. 71. The third beam inscription of the catholicon of the Monastery of St. Catherine's at Sinai prays for the architect, his wife and family: "Lord God, who appeared on this spot, save and bless your servant *Stephanos of Ayla*, the builder of this monastery, and Nonna, and give rest to the souls of their children George, Sergius and Theodora". Emphasis is ours. James Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai. The Story of the World's Oldest Bible – Codex Sinaiticus* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1986), p. 66. Cf. also Ihor Ševčenko, "Inscriptions", in George H. Forsyth, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973), p. 19. On the three beam inscriptions, see also I. Ševčenko, "The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery in Light of its Inscriptions", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966), pp. 255–64. Whether Stephanos was the "builder" or the "architect" is not yet fully determined. [Cf. George H. Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian", in John Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1980), p. 57, and n. 8]. But the inscription in this instance points to the prominence of Ayla, as well as to

The rise of Islam and the phenomenal success of the Arab conquests contained ominous signs for the Byzantine Empire. Writes Theophanes on the year of the death of Muhammad:

In the same year [AM 6124/Sept. 1, 632–Aug. 31, 633], there was an earthquake in Palestine. Also a sign – known as an “apparition” – appeared in the southern sky. It was sword-shaped, and remained for thirty days, stretching from south to north and predicting the Arab conquest.<sup>60</sup>

The disaffection of Arab Christian populations allowed the roads into the Eastern provinces to lay wide open. After Yarmuk (635) confidence led the Muslim Arabs deep into Asia Minor. A nearly contemporary source<sup>61</sup> shows the Arabs spending the winter of 666/7 in Pergamos, Ephesus and Maligna, not far from Nicaea! The victories at land were successive and rapid.<sup>62</sup> The caliphs were not only emulating the emperors, as we said earlier, but they were actively aiming at replacing them and their institutions.<sup>63</sup> They soon developed their own naval force.<sup>64</sup> The first operations, piratical in character, took place in the eastern Mediterranean,<sup>65</sup> the coast of Asia Minor, the islands of Cyprus, Rhodes and Crete, and the coast of Alexandria.<sup>66</sup> The Arab pirates conducted razzias against the Byzantine fleet, interrupted their commercial movements in Eastern Mediterranean, and conducted annual attacks against Alexandria

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the self sufficiency and interdependence of the Christian communities in southern Syria upon each other.

60 dB = 336; T = 37.

61 A. Lolos ed., *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodios* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1976), XIII, 7 pp. 120–1. On the sources and the problems of dates they present, see A. Stratos, *Ἡ Βυζάντιον στὸν ἑβδομὸν αἰῶνα*, vol. 3 (Athens, 1969), pp. 58–63, 76–81, 223. Brock dates the Apocalypse to 690 or 691 “at a time when rumors about the new tax laws were rife”. Syriac views”, p. 19.

62 Cf. dB = 300; T = 11.

63 Cf. Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), pp. 223–233. Vryonis, “Byzantium and Islam”, 211. The Arabs were progressively replacing the Byzantine administration, starting with the replacement of the Byzantine taxes with their own levies. Acquisition of land (*dār Islām*) was, however, their first priority. Thus, even when they were given more money to withdraw from Egypt, they preferred the land to money. dB = 338; T = 38–9.

64 Héléne Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer. La marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzances aux VII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966); cf. also A. M. Fahmy, *Muslim Sea-Power in the Eastern Mediterranean from the 7th to the 10th century AD* (Cairo, 1966); sources on pp. 73–76.

65 Ahrweiler, p. 17.

66 Cf. M. Cheira, *La lutte entre Arabes et Byzantines: la conquête et l'organisation des frontières aux VII<sup>e</sup>–VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Alexandrie, 1947).



and Tripolis (Syria). In 645 the Byzantine fleet retook Alexandria, but the Arabs had conquered and they were well entrenched in the interior. The Byzantines were placed in the defensive and were actually forced to develop a naval force in order to protect the populations on the coast and the islands of the Aegean.<sup>67</sup>

First to recognize the need of building a naval force was Mu'āwiya who proceeded immediately to build a fleet. In 649 Constantia of Cyprus was overcome.<sup>68</sup> Attacks on Rhodes, Cos and Crete followed. In 655, during the battle of Phoenix off the Lycian coast, emperor Constans II barely escaped with his life.<sup>69</sup> The road to Constantinople by sea was now open: after Cos, Chios was taken to the peninsula of Cyzicus in the Propontis. This became the base of assault against Constantinople (670). In 672 Smyrna was taken and the parts of the coast of Cilicia and Lycia were occupied as supply harbours.<sup>70</sup> Two years later (674) an Arab fleet showed itself, for the first time, in front of Constantinople. It laid siege on the capital for four years (678); a sign of determination which defies the explanation of a mere military might. One must sense here a determination which is motivated by a religious conviction of divine mission. The Arabs were defeated only after Kallinicos (interestingly enough, himself a Syrian!) had invented the deadly liquid, called appropriately "Greek fire"<sup>71</sup> which, along with bad weather annihilated the Arab fleet! The imperial City became, within the same century, the focus and the cause of extraordinary victories, as well as of spectacular defeats of the Arabs. No wonder, therefore, that both sides could point to these events, and even to natural phenomena, as omens of divine will and preference.<sup>72</sup>

By the third quarter of the seventh century the threat to the Byzantine Empire were not so much the Arabs as the Bulgars. The Arab caliphs had consolidated also their own power by having subjugated their internal rivals.<sup>73</sup>

67 Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*, p. 23. Mention of the *Karavisiānoi* or (marines) is made in the *Miracula S. Demetrii*, PG 116:1369C; *Liber Pontificalis* (ed. Duchesne) I:390; Mansi, *sc*, XI:737.

68 dB = 343-4, T = 43; cf. also R. Browning, "Byzantium and Islam in Cyprus ...", p. 103.

69 dB = 345-6, T = 45.

70 dB = 353-4; T = 51-2.

71 dB = 354; T=52.

72 Theophanes is keen to record a number of natural disasters and signs: earthquake in Palestine (632/3) dB = 336; T = 37, violent windstorms (647/8) dB = 343; T = 44, earthquakes (658/9) dB = 347; T = 46, harsh winter (670/1) dB = 353; T = 52; a sign was seen in the sky on a sabbath day (675/6) dB = 354; T = 53, earthquake in Mesopotamia (678/9) dB = 356; T = 54, a famine and a great plague in Syria (684/5) dB = 361; T = 59, a famine in Syria (678/9) dB = 364; T = 62; an eclipse of the sun (694/5) dB = 367; T = 65.

73 Theophanes writes: "In this year (690/1) the Arabs' state was finally forced from all warfare [meaning internal civil wars]. Once he had subjected everyone, 'Abd al-Malik made

Of course, Byzantium and its culture had not been replaced by Islam,<sup>74</sup> but Islam had dominated the Arab speaking territories of Byzantium, the entire Near East and North Africa. From the Arab point of view, a prophecy had been fulfilled.<sup>75</sup> In fact, the dream of replacing Greek Byzantium with Arab Islam came closer to become a reality with the surrender of Armenia in the close of the century (693/4). Writes Theophanes: “From then on [the surrender of Armenia to the Arabs] the Hagarenes, growing bolder, ravaged Romania.”<sup>76</sup>

The rapid success of the Arab conquests, and the religious context within which they were conducted, gave rise to messianic and apocalyptic interpretations of the emergence of Islam. For Theophanes the consolidation and the spread of Islam was due to the ignorance and naiveté of the Jews who,

when he [Muhammad] first appeared thought he was the Anointed One [the Messiah] they expected, so that some of their leaders came to him, accepted his religion, and gave up that of Moses, who had looked on God.<sup>77</sup>

Also in the “Teaching of James the Neobaptist”, a writing contemporary to the emergence of Islam, we read that Jews heard with joy that

a prophet appeared, from among the Saracenes, who preaches the advent of the coming *Eleimménou* [= “the Anointed one”]. One of them, however, said of Muhammad that “he is an impostor; because, do prophets come with swords and weapons?” Another Jew noticed of those who associated themselves with Muhammad that “one finds nothing authentic in this so-called prophet, except bloodshed of human beings; for he says that he holds the keys of paradise, something which is characteristic of an infidel.”<sup>78</sup>

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peace”. dB = 365; T = 63.

74 Cf. “Why did the Byzantine Empire not fall to the Arabs?”. An Inaugural Lecture by George Huxley, Director of the Genadius Library in the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (Athens, 22-X-1986).

75 A variant reading of surah *Al-Rūm* (30:2–6) is possible “as if it was intended to transform the passage into a prophesy of defeat of the Byzantines by the Muslims”. W. Montgomery Watt, *Companion to the Qur’ān* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967), p. 184.

76 dB = 367; T = 64.

77 dB = 333; T = 34.

78 *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizanti*, Herausg. von N. Bonwetsch (Berlin, 1910), pp. 86–87. Cf. K. Dyovouniotes, “Ἰάκωβος ὁ Νεοβάπτιστος”, *Ἱερός Σύνδεσμος Ἀθηνῶν*, 7(1911)5–6; quoted by Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, *Ἱστορία Ἐκκλησίας Ἀντιοχείας* (Alexandria, 1951), p. 732.

On the Christian side, and under the name of Stephen of Alexandria,<sup>79</sup> an oracle has survived making predictions on the future of Islam.<sup>80</sup> Another oracle bears the title:

By Stephen the Alexandrian and philosopher, Conclusive treatise to Timotheus his disciple, having as its introduction the newly appeared and godless legislation of Muhammad, foretelling also several and other things that will happen.<sup>81</sup>

In this latter text the author attempts to prophesy through astrology things about the prophet of Islam and his successors, as well as about the future of his religion.

But the most celebrated case of apocalyptic literature is the writing of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara. Under the name of the late third-early fourth century Methodius of Patara (d. 311) there is an "Apocalypse" of a seventh-century Syrian author written in Syriac in 690 or 691, translated soon into Greek and thence into Slavonic and Latin.<sup>82</sup> The text contains two parts: a historical, dealing with the most important reigns on earth, and a prophetic one, dealing with the forerunners of the Antichrist and the end of the human race. Islam, which is identified with the Antichrist, is dealt with in this section, as well as the sufferings and tribulations which the Christians will suffer under it. The

79 This seventh-century intellectual taught philosophy, mathematics and music at the University of Constantinople. He wrote many treatises and "Commentaries" on the works of Hippocrates, Galenos, and Aristotle, as well as a book on astronomy entitled "Διασάφης ἐξ οικειῶν ὑπομνημάτων τῆς τῶν προχείρων κανόνων ἐφόδου τοῦ Θεῶνος". A.S. Kariotoglou, "Ἡ περὶ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ καὶ τῆς πτώσεως αὐτοῦ Ἑλληνικὴ Χρησιμολογικὴ Γραμματεία" (Doctoral Dissertation, Athens, 1982), pp. 40–41.

80 Text in P. Stephanitzes, *Συλλογὴ διαφορῶν προρρήσεων*, (Athens, 1838), pp. 57–67.

81 H. Usener, *Kleine Schriften*, t. 3. (Bonn, 1880), pp. 242–322.

82 The Syriac text remains unpublished in a single ms. Vat. Syr. 58, ff. 118b–137a, of 1584. See, Brock, "Syriac views", pp. 17–20, and n.57. Slavonic text, B. M. Istrin, ed., "Otkrovenie Mefodija Patarskago i Apokrificheskii Videnia Daniela u Vizantiiski i Slaviano-Russkoi Literaturakh", in *Chtenia u Imperatorskom Obshchestvie Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom Universitetie*, Number 193 (Moscow, 1897), pp. 27–31. Cf. Constantelos, "The Moslem Conquests", p. 330. Critical edition of the Greek version, Anastasios Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodios*, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie, Heft 83 (Meisenheim am Glan, 1975). For an extensive discussion of this Apocalypse, see Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) p.13, and Ch. I "The Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius", pp. 13–51 and Ch. II "The First Greek Reaction of Pseudo-Methodius", pp. 52–60. Cf. also, G. J. Reinink, "Ismael, der wildeser in der Wüste. Zur Typologie der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodios", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 75 (1982), pp. 336–44; Kariotoglou, "Ἡ περὶ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ ...", pp. 41–2; and Huxley "Why did the Byzantine Empire not fall to the Arabs?" pp. 11–13.

Apocalypse concludes, however, with a hopeful message that in the end Christ will defeat and prevail over “Ishmael”. The Apocalypse confidently foretells the fall of Constantinople; something inordinate for the majority of the Byzantines who believed that the City was God-protected and that God allowed disasters only as a means of punishment because of heresy.

When the force of Islam could no longer be contained and the notion that the Arab conquests were a temporary punishment had faded, resorting to an apocalyptic interpretation seemed to be the most plausible explanation of this new reality.

## 5 Capitulation of Christian Cities to the Arab Muslims

A phenomenon that needs to be observed in the context of the seventh-century Muslim conquests is the capitulation of major Byzantine cities, by religious authorities. Damascus was capitulated in 635 to Khālib b. al-Walid by what al-Balādhurī characterizes as a “bishop”.<sup>83</sup> In fact, this was John of Damascus’ grandfather, Sargūn b. Mansūr. Jerusalem was capitulated to ‘Umar himself by Patriarch Sophronius, in 638. Edessa was also capitulated, in 638.<sup>84</sup> Alexandria was capitulated by the Monophysite Patriarch Benjamin, in 646.

One direct and favourable outcome of capitulation was that these cities were not destroyed, and that their urban society and life continued after the conquests. This may have been the key consideration of action on the part of their capitulators, especially in the cases of cities filled with sacred places (Jerusalem), or rich in cultural and learning institutions (Damascus). In all instances, the terms of capitulation were almost identical. They covered two areas, *religious* freedom for the Christian population, and paying of a poll tax. The phenomenon and the terms of capitulation points to two considerations: to the prevailing theocratic character of Islam, and to an equivalent ethos of Byzantine Christianity in the Eastern provinces; as well as to the inherent cultural and religious affinity between Middle Eastern Christians and Arab Muslims, even if (or, actually, because of it) this affinity was established in a controversial context and manifested in a polemic fashion.

The long Byzantine presence in the Middle East notwithstanding, the Arab conquests and the consolidation of Islam in the seventh century succeeded primarily because of the alien character of the Greek Byzantine culture

83 al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, pp. 172–189.

84 dB = 340; T = 40; although Theophanes does not mention whether this was done by a civil or an ecclesiastical authority.

veneered upon the indigenous population; the weak, non-congenial and disorganized state in which the Eastern Byzantine provinces were at the time; the deep division and bitter conflicts existing over matters of Christological orthodoxy or heresy.

In contrast, the peninsular Arabs appeared on the scene with all the characteristics of a vibrant force, just freed from their geographical and cultural ghetto, thirsty to appropriate and explore the riches of a privileged life which their fellow Arabs were enjoying, but which they themselves had never experienced before. In those early years Islam provided the Arab Muslims with a cohesive and motivating force for a metaphysical and theocratic justification of their expansion. To the Christians of the Eastern provinces there was little against the Arabs as *Muslims*, and much to their favour. There were plenty of characteristics in Islam, albeit "heretical", which they could recognize and with which to identify, as part of their own faith.

The polemic juxtaposition which the seventh century progressively wrought between Byzantium and Islam was not, strictly speaking, made as a matter of difference on faith, theological doctrine and practice, but rather as a matter of conviction and hope of one theocratic society subjugating and replacing the other. Ironically, it was theocracy, and the mutual affinity in this trait that shaped and determined, early in their history, the relations between the Byzantine and the Islamic societies and, by extension, between Christianity and Islam.

## Eighth-Century Byzantine Anti-Islamic Literature: Context and Forces

The list of eighth-century texts and names of authors with some relevance to Islam<sup>1</sup> includes primarily ecclesiastics, monks, bishops or patriarchs, and one emperor; among them a disproportionate number of hymnographers, such as John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiuma and Andreas of Crete.<sup>2</sup> *Prima facie* and by every stretch of the imagination, few of them are household names in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, especially in Western scholarship, and much of the anti-Islamic literature associated with them is considered by modern Western scholars as spurious or as belonging to later centuries. Prominently the authenticity of John of Damascus' chapter 100/101 of his *De Haeresibus* and the *Dialogues* with a Muslim attributed to him, as well as that of the correspondence between 'Umar II and emperor Leo III, has been questioned.<sup>3</sup> As it would be expected, more has been written *about* these times, in the form especially the *vitae* of saints and martyrs,<sup>4</sup> and less *during* the same period.<sup>5</sup>

Two major developments, one internal and the other external, predominate, colour and dictate the entire Byzantine literature of the eighth century, and the anti-Islamic literature in particular: iconoclasm (726–813), and the expansion

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- 1 John of Damascus (*ca.*650–*ca.*749); Cosmas of Maiuma (*ca.*674–*ca.*751); Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717–741); Theophanes the Confessor (*ca.*817); Theodore Abū Qurra (*ca.*750–*ca.*820); Andreas of Crete (*ca.*660–740); Peter of Maiuma, (d.743); Germanus I Patriarch of Constantinople (730–742); Romanos the Melode (d. after 555); Theodosios Grammaticos (8th c.); *Vita* Elijah (8th c.). Excluded from this review are authors and texts of the non-Chalcedonian tradition, a most interesting but significantly different one of which is the Apology of Patriarch Timothy to caliph Mahdi in 781 or 782. A. Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12 (1928), pp. 147–227.
  - 2 In the list another hymnographer, Romanos Melodos, could have been included if Krumbacher's attempt at revising his dates from *ca.* 485–*ca.* 560 to the eighth century had been successful. Cf. note 1 in the Greek translation of Krumbacher's *Geschichte des byzantinischen Literatur* (Athens: Papyros, 1964), pp. 653–657, by G. Soteriades.
  - 3 On the authenticity of John of Damascus' (*ca.* 655–*ca.* 749) writings on Islam, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 60–6, and 99–102. On the authenticity of the correspondence, see below, n. 26.
  - 4 Cf. e.g. the *vita* of Andreas of Crete, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias* (Brussels: Culture et Civilisation [1963]), vol. v, 169–179.
  - 5 Cf. I.E. Karayannopoulos, *Πηγαί τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἱστορίας* (Thessaloniki, 1978), 213–4.

of the Arab-Muslim caliphate which is now threatening not simply the fringes of the Byzantine empire but Constantinople itself. Albeit a supposedly “internal”, theological and ideological conflict, iconoclasm had much to do, in fact or in perception, and with regard to religious, theological, political and military motivations, with Jews and Muslims. Emperor Leo III (717–741), the so-called “Isaurian” but who in fact was from northern Syria, initiated the official decree against the icons in 726,<sup>6</sup> only shortly after caliph Yazid II (720–4) had issued a similar decree ordering the destruction of figurative representations, crosses and icons throughout his dominion.<sup>7</sup> Although Yazid’s iconoclastic sentiments and policies have been abundantly documented,<sup>8</sup> the evidence of a direct Muslim influence on Byzantine iconoclasm is somewhat shaky, albeit not negligible. Joan M. Hussey has deemed it “*necessary* to consider contacts and debts, if any, between Byzantium and Islam in initiating the policy of banning the use of icons”.<sup>9</sup> The phenomenon, however, that in destroying the icons many Byzantines acted as Muslims, and Muslims as Byzantines, is *not* abrogated by the sources. Leo III was accused by iconophile Byzantines as “Saracen-minded”, as was by the iconoclasts John of Damascus himself, the staunch defender of the icons!<sup>10</sup> In both instances and in the context of the iconoclastic controversy it was the “Muslim mind” that formed the integral factor and the bone of contention! As Joan Hussey again has aptly remarked, with iconoclasm “the two religions, Islam and Christianity, were now face to face”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, iconoclasm produced among Byzantines a passion against other Christian Byzantines but of a different theological persuasion, as it did against non-Christians, outside the empire, notably Jews and especially Muslims. The anti-Islamic literature of the period reflects this anti-iconoclastic passion of the Byzantines against the Muslims.

On the “external” front the eighth century represents the period of transition from a seemingly Arab “internationalism” and “inclusivism” (perceived or

6 The question whether Leo issued one (in 726) or two decrees (in 726 and 730) has been debated. For reference and bibliography, see Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986; 1988), p. 25.

7 Theophanes places Leo’s decree in the period between September 1, 723 and January 27, 724 the date when Yazid died. *Chronographia* [ed. C. de Boor, (Rome) Bardi, 1963], I, p. 402.

8 For reference, see S. Gero, “Early Contacts Between Byzantium and the Arab Empire: a Review and Some Reconsiderations,” in Muhammad Adnan Bakhit (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām during the Early Islamic Period up to 409 A.H./640 AD* (vol. I, Ammān, 1987), pp. 125–132, at 128, n. 15.

9 *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 34–35.

10 Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 4, 9, where the reference to sources.

11 *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, 34.

real) manifested by the early Umayyad caliphate, to a state of Arab nationalism and theocratic exclusivism manifested by caliph 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) and his successors. It is the period of Arabization and Islamization of the caliphate, asserting itself as being distinct, apart from and challenging the Byzantine models which the early Umayyads had adopted. Consider, for example, the introduction for the first time of Muslim coins and the adoption of Arabic as the language of the administration by 'Abd al-Malik.<sup>12</sup> This assertion of identity and replacement of Byzantine models manifested itself in two significant events, the siege of Constantinople (717–718) by Maslamah, brother of Caliph Yazīd II,<sup>13</sup> and the piratic expeditions against the islands of the Aegean, especially Crete.<sup>14</sup>

The second and once again unsuccessful siege of Constantinople (the first took place in 674–679) was so deeply felt by the Byzantines that its failure was elevated into a religious feast day on August 16th and recorded in the Orthodox *Menaion*, the book of monthly feasts and holidays.<sup>15</sup> The salvation of the City and the destruction of the Hagarenes were attributed to the intercession of the Theotokos whose Dormition according to the Orthodox calendar is celebrated only on the previous day. From the point of view of the Arab Muslims, this siege signalled a direct and imminent foretaste: rather than a symbolic proof that the religion of Islam is superior to the faith of the al-Rūm, it prefigured the coming annulment of the legitimacy and of the very existence of a theocratic empire which wrongly claimed that it was representing and expressing the will of God on earth. Notwithstanding its failure thanks to the Greek fire and the intercession of the Theotokos, this second attempt had a positive result for the Arabs: the establishment (or the *promise* by Emperor Leo III to allow the establishment) of the first mosque in Constantinople<sup>16</sup> – a tremendous psychological and tangible victory for the Arab Muslims for whom commemorating the caliph's name in a mosque of their own during prayer sessions implied

12 A. Grabar, "L'icoclasm byzantine", *Dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957). Cf. also El-Cheikh-Saliba, "Byzantium viewed by the Arabs" (Harvard University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992), pp. 39–41.

13 Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 607, and also in Leo Grammaticos, Cedrenos, and Zonaras.

14 Cf. *vita* of Cosmas of Maiuma, ed. Theocharis E. Detorakis, "Ανέκδοτος βίος Κοσμά του Μαΐουμά", *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*, 41 (1974) 259–96, at 270, 272; *vita* of Andreas of Crete, in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta*, v, 177.

15 August 16th. Tabari, *Chronicle*, tr. Zottenberg, vol. IV, pp. 224, 240–243. *Synaxarion* of the Vienna Library, cod. Hist. Graec: #45 (11th c.) published by Sp. Lampros *Ἱστορικά Μελετήματα*, p. 141.

16 Ch. A. Nomikos, "Τό πρώτο τζαμί τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως", *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*, 1 (1924), pp. 199–209.



sovereignty of the territory where the mosque is located!<sup>17</sup> It was not unjustifiably, therefore, that Leo was bitterly chastised by his critics for this concession. Both developments, iconoclasm and the eighth century Muslim expansion, form the next chapter of the “seventh century” – “a time of fundamental transformation throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Balkan world”,<sup>18</sup> and the demarcation line between the “before” and “after” in Byzantine political history; a time which saw the rise of Islam and the beginning of the process of *reduction* of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>19</sup>

Both developments also were apocalyptic and violent which produced numerous martyrs even among prominent ecclesiastics, such as Peter of Maiuma (d. 743). Thus the literature of the period appears fundamentally negative, apologetic, martyrological and apocalyptic, following the patterns of that of the seventh century.<sup>20</sup> It is during the ninth century, which saw contacts and Byzantine embassies with the Abbasids, during which a change in the general character and tone can be noticed in the anti-Islamic literature. A glaring exception perhaps is the Ἔλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ (*Confutatio Agareni*)

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- 17 Cf. El-Cheikh-Saliba, “Byzantium viewed by the Arabs”, p. 46. The practice was obviously adopted by Muslim caliphs from their Byzantine emperors, patriarchs and bishops whose names, according to the Byzantine *typikon*, are commemorated in services in the churches of their sovereignty.
- 18 In the words of John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 1.
- 19 The first “drastic change” in the seventh century meant the detachment from Byzantium of such prominent eastern provinces as Syria, Palestine and Egypt, as well as North Africa. The process continued in the ninth-century with the loss of Sicily and Crete to the Muslim Arabs. Robert Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (revised edition, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1992), p. xv, and pp. xiv–xv, where a brief history of the map of Byzantium. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 9. Cf. also Andreas N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 5 vols. (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1968–1980).
- 20 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “The Seventh century in Byzantine-Muslim relations: characteristics and forces”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2 (1991) 3–22, at 12–16. See Chapter 16 in this volume. Cf. also Harald Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyphtik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main/Bern, 1985) and four important Syriac apocalyptic texts; F.J. Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius”, Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C. 1985). Review and critical remarks on Suermann by S.P. Brock in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 44 (1987), pp. 813–6. Brock reports that yet another translation of the famous Apocalypse of Methodius is in preparation by G.J. Reinik for the series *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Ibid.*, p.814. This kind of apocalyptic sentiment is found expressed mostly by pro-Chalcedonian, rather than by Nestorian or Jacobite writers. Brock, p. 815.

by the enigmatic monk Bartholomeus of Edessa,<sup>21</sup> a clearly polemic piece of literature, exceedingly interesting but also distinct from the more sober ones of John of Damascus and of Abū Qurra. Such exchanges although political in nature retained, nevertheless, significant cultural and religious undertones. They reflected the awareness by the early Abbasids of things Greek and of the cultural and scientific treasures of the Graeco-Byzantine world.<sup>22</sup>

Of greatest interest, as far as Byzantine material on Islam in the eighth century is concerned, are still the pieces of John of Damascus.<sup>23</sup> These include an introduction to Islam, which became a standard guide for subsequent writing on the subject, and two “dialogues” attributed to the same author, the “Disputation of a Saracen and a Christian,”<sup>24</sup> and the refutation of the

21 The ninth-century date of Bartholomeus has, I think, unjustifiably been questioned by Abel and others as I have indicated in recent presentations on the subject which are under publication, a clearly *akephalon* text in *Patrologia Graeca* 104: 1384–1448. This edition bears all the signs of intervention by later copyists with limited knowledge of Greek and of Islam, and with Roman Catholic inclinations. A more accurate edition with a German translation has been produced recently by Klaus-Peter Todt, *Bartholomaios von Edessa. Confutatio Agareni. Kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe* (Würzburg: Telos-Verlag, 1988). Another piece attributed to the same author, entitled *Κατὰ Μωάμεδ* (*Contra Muhammed*) and printed immediately after the first (PG 104: 1448–57) does not seem to come from the same hand.

22 Three characteristics regarding Byzantine embassies to the Arabs are interesting to note: a) that they involved or were conducted by high ranking *ecclesiastics* – a sign of awareness of and sensitivity towards the theocratic nature of the caliphate; b) that the ambassadors were men of great intellectual prominence and especially noted *orators*; and c) that embassies were usually sent to negotiate exchange of prisoners, and deal with humanitarian issues. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “Byzantium and Islam: An Encounter of two Theocracies. Mutual admiration and Exclusion”. “Constantinople and its Legacy” Annual Lecture, Toronto, 1993. For example, John VII Grammatikos, Patriarch of Constantinople (21 Jan. 837?–4 Mar. 843), and a persuasive rhetorician, perhaps of Armenian origin, respected for his knowledge (“Grammatikos”), he was sent in 829/30, upon the accession to the throne of Theophilos whom he had tutored as crown prince, as *synkellos* to an embassy to caliph al-Mamūn (813–833), the patron of Islamic scholarship and founder of the *Bayt al Hikma* (the House of Knowledge). *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1052.

23 Chapter 100/1 in the *De Haeresibus*, PG 94:764–773; a critical edition, by Bonifatius Kotter in the series *Patristische Texte und Studien* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York), under the general title *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, IV. Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica* (1981), pp. 60–7. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, 132–141. Cf. also *idem.*, “John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited”, *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984–1985), pp. 104–118; “The Art and non-art of Byzantine Polemics in Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature”, in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi (Toronto, 1990), pp. 55–73 where additional bibliography. See these articles reprinted in this volume.

24 PG 96:1336–48; Kotter, IV, 427–38; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 142–155.

Saracens,<sup>25</sup> the latter being transmitted via Abū Qurra, bishop of Harran, “διὰ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου Δαμασκηνοῦ” (through the voice of John of Damascus). This qualifier connotes, perhaps, not necessarily authorship, but rather authority related to the name of John of Damascus on matters of Islam. Notwithstanding the extensive study already done on these texts, we have not yet extracted from them their full value and the implications for the history of Byzantine-Muslim relations. One thing is certain, that John of Damascus can be viewed as the earliest and most reliable Christian source on Islam, even if the correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III can be ascertained that it is, indeed, of Leo.

Of a different nature is this purported correspondence between ‘Umar II (717–720) and Emperor Leo III (717–741). If authentic, this may be the earliest or a contemporary to John of Damascus’ theological exchange between a Muslim and a Christian.<sup>26</sup> With questions so brief, succinct, particularly perceptive, and attributed to ‘Umar;<sup>27</sup> and with responses so theologically elaborate, intricate and attributed to Leo,<sup>28</sup> a man of military enterprise than of letters and intellectual sophistication, one wonders whether this “correspondence” was not but an ingenious technique of the Byzantines to present an authoritative, attractive and effective Christian response to Islam by employing the names of two heads of state as interlocutors. It is also questionable whether such a lengthy, negative, name-calling and critical response by an emperor would have produced in a caliph, as Ghevond claims,<sup>29</sup> “a very happy effect”, or a kind disposition towards the Christians. And yet, as Jeffery has shown,

25 PG 96:1596–97; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 156–159.

26 On the question of authenticity, see A. Jeffery, “Ghevond’s text of the correspondence between Omar II and Leo III”, *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), pp. 269–332, at 269–276. Leslie W. Barnard holds the correspondence to be genuine [*The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974)] against H. Beck [“Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung in der theologischen Literatur des Byzantiner”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 114 (1937) 43–46] who makes Ghevond a late-ninth or early-tenth century author, and A. Abel [“La lettre polemique d’Arethas à l’Empire de Damas”, *Byzantion* XXIV/2 (1954), pp. 343–370, at 348] who identifies Leo with Leo the Mathematician (ca. 790–after 869). More recently Stephen Gero has cast doubt on its authenticity. *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 346 (*Subsidia*, Tom. 41, Louvain, 1973), pp. 153–171.

27 ‘Umar’s biography by Muhammad ‘Abdallah Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam (727–829) depicts him as an ideal ruler by bringing together edifying anecdotes, his sermons, prayers, official correspondence and his dealings with people. Franz Rosenthal, “Ibn Abd al-Hakam”, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, 674–5.

28 His son and successor, Constantine V (741–75), a man with significant theological acumen (see his *Peuseis*), might have been a more probable author of such a response.

29 Jeffery, “Ghevond’s text”, 330.

it is not entirely improbable that ‘Umar and Leo might have, indeed, been interreligious interlocutors.<sup>30</sup> If Leo’s sophisticated responses raise doubts of authenticity, so do ‘Umar’s incisive questions. Such questions do not seem to be “almost all *loci communes*”, as Jeffery characterizes them, although one could agree with him that “it is a little surprising to see some of them developed so early as ‘Umar II’”.<sup>31</sup> Some of the questions show a versatility with the Bible and, even more so, a remarkable phenomenological acumen in interpreting Christian practice and idiom – something improbable for a Muslim and at such an early time.<sup>32</sup> It is curious also that ‘Umar mentions the names of Jesus, the prophets and Muhammad without addressing them with the blessing of peace, as Muslims invariably do; a minor but noticeable point, which one may want to attribute not to the original text but to the transmission of Ghevond himself or to editors of the correspondence. Ghevond’s text makes for a most interesting and comprehensive record of issues and arguments of Muslim-Christian dialogue. It is primarily this finesse and comprehensiveness that makes the authenticity of the text suspect.

Of an entirely different character and from later times comes the hagiological *vita* by an unknown author of Cosmas (*ca.* 674–*ca.* 751 or 760), adopted brother of John of Damascus and later bishop of Maiuma. Although its earliest existing version dates from the eleventh century,<sup>33</sup> and its hagiological style and character are most evident, the text is nevertheless significant for the late seventh and eighth century experiences and impressions it depicts. Of special interest are the historical or possibly anecdotal references to the adoption of Cosmas by John of Damascus’ father before John was born (biographical data of some interest to the otherwise obscure life of John of Damascus), and especially the frequent and vivid references to the Saracen piracies against the island of Crete. With some expected exaggeration this hagiological text exalts Cosmas of Crete, the teacher of John of Damascus and of Cosmas, as a Christian and as a teacher, with no equivalent in Damascus.<sup>34</sup> The Christian consciousness retained Damascus as an actively Greek and Christian city in spite of, or

30 *Op. cit.*, 270ff.

31 *Op. cit.*, 278.

32 Cf. e.g. question # 7: “Why do they [the Christians] profess three gods, and arbitrarily change the laws, such as that of circumcision into baptism, that of sacrifice into the eucharist, that of Saturday into Sunday?”, *op. cit.*, 278.

33 Codex Laura 44, ff. 150r–157v. BHG, 394B. Another *vita* of Cosmas is found in the 14th century Vaticanus Barberini 583(= VI.22 = 467) between the pages 722–756, edited by Theocharis E. Detorakis, “Ανέκδοτος βίος Κοσμά του Μαΐουμά”, *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 41 (1974), pp. 259–96, text 265–96.

34 “Ὡς μεγίστη δὲ καὶ ἡ σπάνις τῶν τῆς ἑλληνικῆς σοφίας παιδευτῶν παρ’ αὐτοῖς, ὡς ἀνδρὶ χριστιανῶ καὶ πρεσβύτῃ καὶ μοναχῶ παραθεῖναι αὐτὸν τοὺς υἱοῦς”, Detorakis, 279.

along with, Islam! From its school of rhetoric major ecclesiastical figures, such as Sophronius “the Sophist” (560–638) and later Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638), John of Damascus the great theologian and hymnographer, Andreas of Crete the hymnographer, and Peter of Maiuma, had graduated. The *vita* of Cosmas does confirm, however, information gathered from other sources about John of Damascus’ and Cosmas of Maiuma’s education, as well as allusions about the times and the date of death of John. Interestingly enough, the *vita* remains silent on John of Damascus’ service in the Umayyad court as minister of finance, a most significant aspect of John of Damascus’ life. Another hagiological *vita*, that of a certain (monk?) Elijah also from Damascus (he died as martyr in 795), provides us, again indirectly, with a glimpse of Christian life in Syria under caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809).<sup>35</sup>

Theophanes the Confessor (*ca.* 755–*ca.* 817) is, perhaps, the most colourful and at times the most useful writer of the proto-Islamic period. Albeit a chronographer, Theophanes is actually less a historian and more a commentator, or what we would call today, a political and spiritual “analyst”. His personal life, his commitment to the monastic life and his strict Orthodox ethos formed in him a particularly distasteful attitude towards anything non-Orthodox; something which is reflected in his unguarded idiom and use of epithets. Cognizant of the author’s biases one should be, however, grateful for the historical glimpses of information he provides for the first one and a half centuries of Islam as well as for the sentiments of his co-religionists during his own life time, up to 813, i.e. up to the early Abbasid caliphate. From this point of view Theophanes can serve as a “seismograph” of the feelings of an average Byzantine towards Islam and the Muslims during the proto-Islamic period. His source about Islam seems to have been a late eighth-century chronicle written originally in Syria used as source also by the historians Michael the Syrian, Patriarch of Antioch (1166–1199), and Bar Hebraeus (1225–1286).

Much of the early Byzantine anti-Islamic literature was influenced by the end of Christians who died as martyrs in the hands of Muslims, references which have been recorded with passion by such writers as Theophanes. A case in point is Peter of Maiuma whom caliph Walid II (743–744) sent into exile in Yemen and had his tongue amputated for criticizing “τὴν τῶν Ἀράβων καὶ Μανιχαίων δυσσεβειαν” (“the impiety of the Arabs and the Manichaeans”).<sup>36</sup>

35 Ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Sbornik Palestinoskoj i Sirijskoj agiologii 1: Pravoslavnyj palestinskij Sbornik* (= Collection of Palestinian and Syriac hagiology. 1: Orthodox Palestinian Collection), St. Petersburg 9 (3, 1907) 42–59. Cf. Karayannopoulos, Πηγάι, 210.

36 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1, 416. The reference to Islam and to Manichaeism in this instance is somewhat puzzling. It may be pointing to Peter’s outspokenness against anyone who was not Christian; a criticism which created disturbances which Walid could

The martyrological background of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature in all centuries has not yet been investigated.

Of yet a different kind of context and thus a different reference to Islam is the one presented by Germanus Patriarch of Constantinople (715–730). In a letter to Thomas of Claudiopolis in defence of the iconophile theology, Germanus condemns the religious practices, prayers and symbols of Greeks, Jews and Muslims, making specific reference to the *hajj* and to the reverence of the Ka'ba by the latter. As an ardent iconophile, Germanus depicts the Muslims as idol worshippers. He writes:

... τὴν μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τελουμένην παρ' αὐτῶν λίθῳ ἀψύχῳ προσφώνησιν, τὴν τε τοῦ λεγομένου Χοβάρ ἐπίκλησιν, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῆς ματαίας αὐτῶν πατροπαραδότου ἐκέισε ἀναστροφῆς ὡς ἐν ἐπισήμῳ ἑορτῇ παιγνιδίῳ μυστήρια.<sup>37</sup>

This reference, dating from as early as 724<sup>38</sup> when Germanus' letter was probably written, may be earlier than and thus the source of the very similar reference of John of Damascus made in chapter 100/1. A comparison between the two shows that a) the veneration is understood by the two authors to be offered to a *stone*;<sup>39</sup> b) the sentence “up to now” (μέχρι τοῦ νῦν) is common in both texts and implies some existential source and experience; and c) both authors understand and interpret the practice as *idolatrous*.<sup>40</sup> Germanus is specific on this point when, in addition to the Jews, he refers to those “as well

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neither tolerate, nor afford. The word “Manichaeans” also may be here in the place of “Persians”, or Shi'a, Muslims. Thence, the expression “Arabs and Manichaeans” may simply mean *all Muslims*, Sunni Arabs and Shi'i Persians.

37 Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et amplissima Collectio* (Florence, 1759–1798), XIII: 109E.

38 A.A. Vasiliev, “The Iconoclastic edict of Caliph Yazid II, AD 721”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9–10 (1955–1956) 25–47.

39 For John of Damascus the stone represents the likeness of Aphrodite, of “Khabar” which, according to the Damascene, means “great” and is the Arabic name for Aphrodite. PG 94:764B; Kotter, IV, 60. Germanus understands “Khobar” to be a “lifeless stone”. Mansi, XIII:109E. The masculine gender (“λίθῳ ἀψύχῳ προσφώνησιν, τὴν τε τοῦ λεγομένου Χοβάρ”) leaves little doubt that the stone itself was called “Khobar”. Elsewhere I have suggested that “khobar” may be confused with the exclamation “*Allahu akbar*” addressed to God, rather than to the stone itself. *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 84ff; and “The Arab character of the Christian disputation with Islam. The case of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)”. In *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 185–205, at 195–6. See Chapter 21 in this volume.

40 in John of Damascus, PG 94:764B; Kotter, IV, p. 60.

[meaning obviously the Muslims] who really practice idolatry".<sup>41</sup> One wonders whether Germanus' description of the ritual during the *hajj* comes either from some oral rendition or from some earlier Syro-Palestinian source from which both, he and John of Damascus, drew their information. In either case one should read Germanus' remarks under the light and influence of Byzantine iconoclasm, a crucial moment of common history of Byzantium and of Islam which made Muslim-Byzantine relations and literature interwoven.

Theodore Abū Qurra (c.750–c.825), bishop of Haran, a city whose population in its majority was Christian, represents a different genre of literature and attitude. Theodore is the "rationalist" of sorts. He wrote in Arabic, championing rather the thought and the attitude of John of Damascus than translating the Damascene's works, as L.E. Goodman has claimed.<sup>42</sup> Abū Qurra engaged Muslims in an intellectual debate; thence the larger and different role he played in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. In the words of Goodman,

his work invites, in fact demands, a Muslim and a Jewish Arabic *kalām*, in much the way that exposure to Aristotle would tempt the speculatively inclined to try their hands at *falsafah*, and as, in fact, two centuries before, exposure to Jewish and Christian scriptures had provoked Muhammad first to conceive an Arabic *Qur'ān*.<sup>43</sup>

Abū Qurra is an insider; tolerant, but also bold and articulate, whose straightforwardness makes him attractive rather than distasteful to his adversaries. In the history of Byzantine-Muslim relations the *Arab* congeniality in language and culture constructed bridges of tolerance and understanding between Muslims and Christians.

In Abū Qurra's writings we must detect the line of thought, the techniques and the substance of information which belong to John of Damascus, and credit these qualities to him. On the other hand in Abū Qurra we must recognize the public person that he was. John of Damascus was "arguing" from the confines of a monastery, constructing hypothetical, albeit realistic, refutations and debates, most likely for the sake of Christians confronting Muslims in their everyday life. Abū Qurra was living and enacting such a debate himself! It was

41 "τούτο τοίνυν ἐν πρώτοις γινώσκειν χρεών, ὡς οὐ νῦν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλάκις καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, τὰ τοιαῦτα (i.e. against the icons) ἡμῖν προσήγαγον εἰς ὀνειδισμόν, καὶ οἱ τῆς ὄντως εἰδωλολατρείας θεραπευταί".

42 L.E. Goodman, "The translation of Greek materials into Arabic", in M.J.L. Young *et al.* eds., *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 477–97, at 484.

43 *Ibid.* p. 484.

in the context of a public stand that Abū Qurra was able to challenge and influence the Muslims to approach doctrine with an inquisitive “rational” disposition, particularly those who were seeking a rational explanation for matters of faith, like the Mu‘tazilites.

### Concluding Remarks

Of the eighth-century contemporary literature, John of Damascus’ chapter on “the heresy of the Ishmaelites”, the first description of Islam, and Abū Qurra’s *Opuscula* and *Dialexis*, the most mature inter-faith controversies are, in my view, the most significant. Both originate not from Constantinople, but from “within” the Arab world. This literature is congenial to and realistic of the situation. It provides no solutions to the new political realities but is a means of containing the damage already occurred in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire, halting any further erosion in the membership of the community,<sup>44</sup> and preserving what can be preserved; in fact enhancing it.<sup>45</sup> By treating Islam as a “heresy of the Ishmaelites”, John of Damascus warned his contemporary Christians (so familiar with heresy) of the heretical character of Islam, without posing a “threat” to the Muslims. The eighth-century Byzantine anti-Islamic literature is conscientiously more constructively predisposed towards Islam than its Western counterpart, if for no other reason for dealing with a known mentality and culture, as well as for seeking to nurture and provide guidance and hope to the indigenous Christian population. Such intentions and methodologies, although not stated, transpire through the personality of their writers, their ethos, character and idiom, as well as through a certain commitment to spirituality and doctrinal orthodoxy. We have a glimpse of this in the *vita* of Andreas of Crete regarding the character and the ethos of the city of Damascus:

44 Massive conversion of Jews to Islam had already occurred; thence one of the most plausible explanations of Yazid’s iconoclastic policies. Cf. Gero, “Early Contacts”, p. 129.

45 The so-called “dark age” of Byzantium may not be so (if at all) dark if viewed under the light of the Damascene renaissance of the late seventh and eighth century. On this see, the *Byzantium in the early period of Islam* project, especially vol. 1, Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East. I. Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc. 1992). I have attempted to highlight the importance of the circle of intellectuals coming from Damascene after the Arab conquests in a study “Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad period. The “circle” of John of Damascus”, *ARAM Periodical* 6 (1994) 35–66, reprinted in this volume as Chapter 20.



Δαμασκός δὲ πόλις αὐτοῖς, οὐδὲν δυτικὸν ὡς ἐξ ἐχθρῶν ἀπίστων εἰσάγουσα, ἀλλὰ μία τῆς Ἀνατολῆς τυγχάνουσα, πρὸς ἀνατολὴν πίστεως αὐτοῖς ὀρθοδόξου μηδὲν κατασκιάσασα.<sup>46</sup>

One should keep in mind that one of the mss of this *vita* dates from the 10th c. that is, before the schism. This statement, therefore, may carry perhaps some anti-Western sentiment of the Photian era but it does not reflect yet the bitterness of the schism, let alone that of the Fourth Crusade. It is, therefore, a more sober and realistic depiction of the ethos of Damascus from which most of the eighth-century anti-Islamic literature originated. Having served as the capital for the Umayyad caliphate and having, by the tenth century, been practically a Muslim city, Damascus was and had remained for the Christians a city of their own; safe, congenial, and Orthodox. In the Christian consciousness Damascus continued to be a Christian city and a spiritual centre, within, and in spite of, Islam!

The eighth-century Byzantine literature which makes reference to Islam is a mixed bag of ideas, information, and misinformation; often puzzled and aggravated by the doctrine and practice of Islam, and particularly the life and policies of the Muslims as individuals and masters of the land. It is also preoccupied and influenced by its own internal theological and political turmoil and presuppositions, especially iconoclasm. It is a literature searching for meaning and clarifications of this new "heresy" of the Ishmaelites. But, in essence, it is a sober literature, deeply concerned with the trauma and the pastoral needs of the Christian population of an Empire which, for the first time, is shaken internally and externally at its very roots and foundations.

46 "Their city was Damascus which did not present anything western, as if from unfaithful enemies, but it was a city of the East which shaded nothing from the rising side of the Orthodox faith". Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta*, v, 170.



**PART 3**

*Damascenica*





## John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited

With the publication of the critical edition of the writings of John of Damascus<sup>1</sup> and more specifically of his two short writings on Islam (chapter 100 in the book *On the Heresies* and the *Disputation between a Saracen and a Christian*<sup>2</sup>) we are now standing on a firmer basis when we speak about John of Damascus on Islam.<sup>3</sup>

The lack of such a critical edition, however, had not discouraged scholars earlier from studying this great Father of the Church, East and West, and his relations to the Muslim community, since these texts have an early tradition, and they had long been connected with the reputation of expertise and authority of the Damascene on Islam.

Every scholar, of course, appreciates the value of a critical edition of a text as a basis for studying the thought of an author. In the case of John of Damascus I had cautioned myself and my readers that any conclusion on his actual statements or thought on Islam must be viewed and treated as tentative until a critical edition of his writings became available.<sup>4</sup> However, the notion that without a critical edition no work can be done on a text<sup>5</sup> – even on one with a long tradition and of an acknowledged significance – is, perhaps, extreme and untenable. This preoccupation seems to be connected with the concern over the authenticity of the text. However, although the question of the reconstruction of a text in its original form is related to its authenticity, the one issue is not identical with the other. The analysis and study of the substance of a writing which stands on a firm tradition and reads adequately well is an

1 *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. by P. Bonifatius Kotter (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, Vols. I *Capita philosophica*, 1969; II *Expositio fidei*, 1973; III *Contra imaginum*, 1975; IV *De haeresibus*, 1981; V *Homiletica et hagiographica*, 1988). From here on referred to as Kotter and vol. number.

2 Texts Kotter, IV, 60–67; 426–438. The section of the *Disputation* is titled *Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni* instead of *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* to comply with that of the Greek text, *Διάλεξις Σαρακηνοῦ καὶ Χριστιανοῦ*.

3 This article is a brief excursus through the main points of the topic studied in my *John of Damascus on Islam. The “heresy of the Ishmaelites”*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972 (from here on referred to as Sahas), with reference to some new material, comments or criticisms made to my study.

4 Sahas, pp. 66, 67 (1), 74.

5 See J. Darrouzes's comments in his review of Sahas's book in the *Revue des études byzantines* 31 (1973), 369.

enterprise which, more often than not, facilitates the very process of the critical reconstruction of the text. From Kotter's own notes on the *Haer. 100* and the *Disputatio* one can possibly infer that some significant insight must have been offered to the editor by the studies on the substance of these texts, in producing their critical version. Some of my own earlier objections to Migne's rendering of the *Disputation* (objections made only on the basis of the contextual and historico-critical evidence) have been vindicated by the critical edition of this text.<sup>6</sup> The critical edition of the *Haer. 100* has established not only the authenticity of the text, but also its format, which is almost identical with that in Migne.<sup>7</sup> The critical edition of the *Disputation* has produced a text which at times is significantly different from that in Migne.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, a new English translation and analysis of the *Disputation* on the basis of the critical edition of its text appear to be justifiable. The same may not be necessary for chapter 100 of the *Heresies*.

## 1 Who is John of Damascus?<sup>9</sup>

He is known as John of Damascus, or John the Damascene. He has also a less-known Arabic name, Yuhanna b. Mansur b. Sargun. His family and himself were deeply rooted into the Arabic culture, to the extent that Byzantine iconographers depict him always wearing a turban.<sup>10</sup> Only in Greek circles is he known by his Christian name, John, and his ecclesiastical titles "presbyter and monk". His family is connected with the capitulation of Damascus by his

6 See Sahas esp. pp. 143, 149. If V. Poggi is referring to these two instances of my translation of the text of the *Disputation* from Migne "as not quite precise" [*Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 38 (1972), 515], he must have missed the footnotes on the same pages where I point to the apparent mistaken Greek version.

7 PG 94:764–773. Notice also Kotter's conviction about the authenticity of the text, expressed in his review of Sahas' book in *The Thomist* 37 (1973), 782, almost ten years prior to the publication of its critical edition!

8 PG 1336–1348.

9 The bibliography on John of Damascus is diversified and extensive. For a collection of the most important references, see Anastasios Kallis, "Handapparatur zum Johannes-Damaskenos-Studium", *Ostkirchlichen Studien* 16 (1967), 200–213; Sahas, pp. 160–168; and Kotter's volumes where references are given to primary sources and to secondary literature.

10 J. Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas. Son époque, sa vie, son œuvre*. Paris: Office des Éditions Universitaires, 1950, p. 16. See, for example, such icons in Cod. 380m, fol. 9<sup>r</sup> of the Monastery of Xyropotamou, as well as in Cod. 431, fol. 64<sup>r</sup> of the Monastery of Dionysiou, in S.M. Pelekanidis, ed. *The Treasures of Mt. Athos*. Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1974, vol. 1, pp. 144 (pl. 166), 351 (pl. 465).

grandfather Mansur b. Sargun to Khalid b. Walid in 635.<sup>11</sup> It is for this reason that although he was a major theologian and hymnographer, a monk and a priest, his opponents in the Byzantine court branded him as “Saracen-minded” (meaning, perhaps, one inclined to Islam), “mamzer” (which means “bastard”) and “conspirator against the Empire”.<sup>12</sup> Some emperors of Byzantium were not any different from certain presidents and prime ministers today when it comes to using base and unguarded language to refer to their political opponents and critics ...

Indeed, the very fact that the Mansur family played a significant role in the affairs of Syria, especially after the fall of the Eastern Roman province to the Arabs, was too sensitive an issue for any Byzantine living in Constantinople to pay attention to what John had to say about Islam. For the contemporary iconoclast Byzantine Emperors, Leo III (717–741) and Constantine V (741–775), John of Damascus was too independent a thinker and theologian. From the political point of view, and in reference to his relations with the Arab Muslims, he was for them at best naïve and at worst a traitor.<sup>13</sup> In reference to his dealings with Islam, even as a heresy, he was too analytical and factual for the prevalent populist and official mentality of “do not bother me with facts – I have made up my mind!” Here is, I think, the key to understanding the personal character of the iconoclast Byzantine emperors’ opposition to John of Damascus. The latter was a theologian who transcended the border limitations of an Empire. The former were rationalists who confined religion to political expediency. Iconoclasm and Islam – two contemporaneous developments in Byzantium at the time of John of Damascus – were, for some like him, as much matters of *theological* heresy, as they were for other matters of political ideology. The line between a theological and political doctrine was a very fine one at the time. As we know also from the history of the development of earliest Islam itself, it was political sensitivities that raised issues and formed articles of Islamic faith: the assassination of the Uthman sparked the first Kharijite revolt which set in motion the controversy over the question who is a Muslim and what is the relationship between faith and works (Kharijites and Murji’ites). The policies and life-style of the Umayyad court raised the question of freedom of will and man’s power; a question which gave rise to a number of trends and movements (Jabrites, Qadarites, Murji’ites, Mu’tazilites and later the synthesizers

11 On the capitulation of Damascus and the Mansur family see Sahas, pp. 17–22. The city was recaptured for a while and fell permanently into the hands of the Arabs in 636.

12 G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XIII:356. On the intentional distortion of the family name Mansur to Mamzer and the meaning of the epithet “Saracen-minded”, see Sahas, pp. 4–13.

13 Mansi, XIII:356 (“... conspirator against the empire”).

Ash'arites).<sup>14</sup> And, as on all these questions the authority of the Qur'an was invoked, the question of the meaning of "Word of God", the essence and the attributes of God came under debate and scrutiny.

The life and the literary activity of John of Damascus coincide with this initial unrest and the process of the theological self-understanding of the earliest Muslim community. He was born and raised in Damascus. His life falls between the years 652 and 749. Most scholars place his date of birth in 675, although some indications from the existing sources allow us to move this date further back.<sup>15</sup> A *Vita* by an anonymous writer suggests that John was educated originally with "the books of the Saracens."<sup>16</sup> Whether the expression implies Muslim books,<sup>17</sup> or Oriental (Christian) literature is not certain. With the permission of caliph Mu'awiyah I (661–680), John's father freed Cosmas, a captive Sicilian monk, and made him tutor to his son so that "μη̄ μόνον τὰς τῶν Σαρακηγῶν βίβλους ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς τῶν Ἑλλήνων παρά τοῦ διδασκάλου μάθοιμι", according to John's own desire. Cosmas, a man of religious but also ἐγκυκλίου παιδείας ("secular" education?), was eager to transmit his knowledge to special students; and this παιδεία included subjects such as grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, Aristotelian ethics, physical theory, arithmetic, geometry, musical harmony, astronomy; subjects and elements which one finds abundantly in the Damascene literary production.<sup>18</sup> In his youth he befriended the Arab

14 A.J. Wensick, *The Muslim Creed. Its Genesis and Historical Development*. London: Frank Cass and Co., 1965, passim.

15 No new evidence has been produced to allow us to fix the dates of John of Damascus's life with certainty. A. Khoury's objection to my advancing the date of his birth to sometime after 652 is admittedly justifiable. In such a case one would have to accept that John wrote *The Fount of Knowledge*, his *magnum opus* (in 743) when he was in his nineties(!); *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 58 (1974), p. 150.

16 A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*. Brussels: Culture and Civilization, 1963, vol. IV, p. 273; henceforth referred to as *Vita*.

17 On the Arabic literature (especially pre-Islamic poetry) and Muslim literature available at the time, see K.A. Fariq, *History of Arabic Literature*. Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1972, esp. pp. 52 ff.

18 Cf. *Vita* p. 273. Without ignoring the hagiological hyperbole, one cannot easily bypass the intellectual profile of the Sicilian monk which another *Vita Joannis Damasceni* (PG 94, 429–489) by John, Patriarch of Jerusalem provides, given especially its autobiographical style. See, PG 94, 441C. The secondary bibliography on Byzantine education in this period is voluminous and much diversified. Cf. Paul Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantine. Notes et remarques sur enseignements et culture à Byzance des origines au X<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971. See also the interesting Ph.D. Dissertation of N.M. Kalogeras, "Byzantine Childhood Education and its Social Role from the Sixth century until the end of Iconoclasm". Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2000.



Christian poet Akhtal<sup>19</sup> and together they became close friends and commensals of Caliph Yazid I (680–683)

His public life as secretary of finance falls within the reigns of the Umayyad Caliphs ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705) and Walid I (705–715). He inherited this position from his father and before him from his grandfather – a position which administered the entire Syria and the rich province of the Lebanese Phoenicia.<sup>20</sup> Whether this portfolio included also the ministry, or part of it, of war affairs, may be conjectural, but interesting to note.<sup>21</sup> The early Umayyad administration retained essentially Heraclius’s structure of administration in terms of Byzantine military zones (*themata*)! To later Byzantine writers the position of John of Damascus appeared very prominent. They call him, among others, “general logothetes”, “head advisor”, (*proto-symboulos*), and minister (*logas*).<sup>22</sup> The Arabic *Vita*, translated by John of Jerusalem, calls John of Damascus’ father “commander of the public affairs throughout the country”,<sup>23</sup> while the anonymous *Vita* relates that John’s father was a “ruler of Damascus” whom the people called “emir” (“ὄν καὶ ἀμηράν ἐκάλουν”).<sup>24</sup>

Sometime before 726, possible in 724, he left public life in Damascus for the monastery of Mar Sabbas in the Judean desert. It was during his life in the monastery that he wrote most of, if not all, his works.

On account of his cultural and religious affiliation he spoke Greek. On account of his descent he spoke Arabic.<sup>25</sup> Aramaic also was, perhaps, the language which he spoke at home. Everything he wrote (an impressive amount, indeed, of hymnographical, exegetical, moral, ascetic, controversial and systematic literature), was in Greek. Many of his writings were translated into Arabic.<sup>26</sup> Some of these translations go back to the tenth century; they were

19 It might not be coincidental that John of Damascus evolved to be one of the most prominent hymnographers of the Eastern Church, having from the earliest years of his life been exposed to poetry and poets.

20 Nasrallah, p. 9.

21 Jawad Boulos, *Les peuples et les civilisations de Proche Orient*, Vol. IV: *De l'expansion Arabo-Islamique à la conquête Turco-Ottomane (640–1517)*. La Haye: Mouton and Co., 1964, p. 248.

22 See Sahas, pp. 41–45.

23 PG 94:437.

24 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta*, IV, 272.

25 This matter has been debated but not yet settled. A number of strong indications point to the fact that he did speak Arabic. If the Arabization of the administration in Damascus was completed during the reign of ‘Abd-al-Malik and Walid I (i.e. between 685–715) and John served as secretary during their reign and retired shortly before 726, it seems unlikely that he did not speak Arabic as a court official. See also Sahas, pp. 45–47.

26 George Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, Città del Vaticano, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, vol. I, 1944, pp. 378–9.

undertaken by Antonius, Abbot of St. Simeon's monastery in Antioch. Another translator of John of Damascus is Archbishop 'Abd Allah b. al-Fadl b. 'Abd Allah, the Arabic-speaking Melkite Archbishop of Antioch, known for his vast knowledge of Greek. The largest depository of John of Damascus's writings in Arabic translation is the monastery of St. Catherine's in Sinai.<sup>27</sup> John of Damascus died some time before 754, the year when the Iconoclastic Council of Hieria (Chalcedon) anathemized him. The most often stated year of his death is 749; and there is no compelling reason to dispute this date.

## 2 John of Damascus on Islam

What John of Damascus wrote about Islam, he did in two very brief works. The one is a short systematic introduction to Islam, as chapter 100 of his book on *Heresies*. The other is in the form of a dialogue or disputation between a Muslim and a Christian, mainly on the question of free will. The *Disputation* concludes with a brief debate which, clearly, has to do with the question of progressive prophetic revelation, the Muslim belief that Islam is the last phase of God's revelation and that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets.<sup>28</sup>

A detailed analysis of these two short writings reveals a comprehensive knowledge of the phenomenon Islam and an awareness of trends and movements within the Muslim community on the part of John of Damascus; broader than that of an average Muslim.<sup>29</sup> Such an analysis provides us also with significant historical insights on the state of earliest Islam.<sup>30</sup>

The main points of John's account of Islam, as the "heresy of the Ishmaelites", are the following:

1. He refers initially to the pagan, litholatric, character of religion in the pre-Islamic Arabia. The identical depiction of the religion during the *jāhiliyyah* by John of Damascus and Hisham Ibn al-Kalbi (d. 821/2) is worth noticing at this point. They both depict this religion as the Abrahamic tradition

27 Aziz S. Atiya, "St. John Damascene: Survey of the Unpublished Arabic Versions of his Works in Sinai" in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honour of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965, pp. 73–83.

28 Qur'ān 33:40; Sahas, p. 121.

29 We see here an identical depiction of the pre-Islamic Arabian religion with that of Ibn al-Kalbi. The reference to a number of sūrahs mentioned by their headings and at times Qur'ānic passages quoted verbatim as well as the allusion to earliest Islamic traditions and apologetics, are some of the evidences of John of Damascus's broad and factual knowledge of Islam.

30 It is impossible, of course, to repeat here what we have already discussed in our study of *John of Damascus*. For an extensive, although not yet exhaustive, analysis of these texts, see Sahas, pp. 67–95; 103–126.

which deteriorated into litholatry.<sup>31</sup> Ibn al-Kalbi derived his knowledge of the *jāhiliyyah* from his father, Muhammad ibn al-Said al-Kalbi (d. 763),<sup>32</sup> almost a contemporary to John of Damascus.

2. He attempts to make a change of the name “Saracen” to “Sarracen” from Sarrah, Abraham’s wife. John of Damascus is, perhaps, the first byzantine author who introduced this etymological distortion (Sarra-cens = from “those left empty of [Sarrah’s] blessing”), for polemic purposes.<sup>33</sup> Giving a pointed or ambiguous etymology to names is not something unknown in polemic or apologetic literature. John of Damascus proves himself to be a masterful name-fabricator. He gives the Muslims the Greek name *Koptae* (“Mutilators”) in order to counterbalance the Muslim accusation to the Christians that they are *Hetaeristae* (“Associators”; *mushrikūn*) for assigning a Son to God.<sup>34</sup>
3. He depicts Muhammad as an *Arian* heretic, and a superficial one, with a casual knowledge of the Old and the New Testament.<sup>35</sup> Unlike what has been maintained in general that it was Nestorianism<sup>36</sup> which influenced Islam the most, John of Damascus appears more perceptive than that: Arianism denied the co-eternity of the Son and, thus, his consubstantiality to the Father. This, actually, seems to be the essence of the Muslim objection to the Christian Christology. Islam wants primarily to maintain the uniqueness and unity of God. The Christian assertion of the consubstantiality of Christ to the Father (“begotten, not made”) makes Christ “Lord”, as well as the cause “through whom *all things* were made”,

31 Ibn al-Kalbi, *Kitāb al-Asnām* (The Book of Idols) tr. by N.A. Faris. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952.

32 *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, ed. and tr. by Bayard Dodge, N. York, Columbia University Press, vol. 1, 1970, pp. 206–216.

33 V. Christides’ suggestion at this point that George Phrantzes in the fifteenth century was the first Byzantine to give “Saracen” the etymological twist of the name to mean “those who have been sent away (without grace) by Sarah” is obviously erroneous. “The names Ἄραβες, Σαρρακηνοὶ etc., and their false byzantine etymologies” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65 (1972), 329–333.

34 Kotter, IV, pp. 63–64. (II. 70, 73, 76, 77). The Arabic term *ta’til* was applied to the Mu’tazilites by their opponents to indicate that the Mu’tazilites, by denying the reality of the Qur’ān as the actual “word of God”, emptied or divested God of attributes. It was suggested by Kremer in 1863 that the word *ta’til* is equivalent to the Christian w. *kenōsis* (κένωσις, from v. in Phil. 2:7). H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 62. John of Damascus might have borrowed the notion of *ta’til* in order to arrive at his own name *Koptae*; or the opposite. With this name however he might have given ammunition to the opponents of the Mu’tazilites.

35 Kotter, IV, p. 60 (II. 11–13).

36 Another MS (Codex R.2508) names Jews, Arians and Nestorians as sources of Muhammad’s teaching. PG 94:765.

according to the Nicene Creed. The Qur'ān, instead, wants Christ to be a "servant"<sup>37</sup> and a creature, made like Adam.<sup>38</sup> Thus "createdness"<sup>39</sup> and "submission"<sup>40</sup> are at the heart of the Arian theology. Arius first addressed himself to the question of *essence* of the Son; Nestorius then to the question of *relationship of the natures* in Christ. The difference is significant. The Qur'ān and the earliest Muslim theologians could not have had the sophistication in Christian theology to know both Christological developments and adopt the latter as a model of their Islamic Christology. One may say that behind the Qur'ānic Christology is Arianism, while behind the early Islamic doctrine of the Qur'ān as the uncreated speech, or word, of God and the controversy about essence and attributes of God, is Nestorianism.<sup>41</sup>

4. He presents the faith of Islam accurately, in terms of its fundamental doctrine of the unity and uniqueness of God, by actually quoting verses from *Sūrat al-Tawhīd*<sup>42</sup> and the first passage of the Qur'ān.<sup>43</sup>
5. After Theology, he proceeds to an exposition of the Islamic Christology. As a matter of fact one may argue that in his treatment of Islam John of Damascus follows the order of the systematic theology and that of the Mediaeval Christendom, divided into Theology, Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology.<sup>44</sup> What he reports about Christ in Islam has a direct Qur'ānic foundation.<sup>45</sup>
6. He questions the authority of Muhammad and he alludes to vigorous debates between Muslims and Christians on this matter. His own main objection is that Muhammad is not supported by any outside witness that he had received the Qur'ān, since, as the Muslims themselves claim, he received it while asleep. Later polemicists expanded on the criteria of the

37 4:172, 43:59.

38 3:59.

39 Arius's equivalent is his characteristic statement "there was a time when (the Son) was not" and even his use of the exact word "created". Mansi, II:665, 887, 880, 916.

40 Arius following his teacher, Lucian, would call this "subordination", after Origen.

41 The wording, in Codex R.2508, supports this conclusion when it states that Muhammad received "from Arianism (the doctrine) that the Word and Spirit are creatures, and from Nestorianism the worship of a (mere) man", PG 94:765.

42 Q 112:1.

43 Q 96:1; Kotter, IV, p. 61 (II. 17–18).

44 This order seems to have been inspired by the order of the statements in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. Is it at all possible to suggest that there is a similar logical or "systematic" order behind the Islamic principles of faith [belief in God, in Book, in angels, in prophets, in the Day of Judgement] and that there is a certain correspondence between them and the topics of the Christian systematic theology?

45 E.g. Q 4:171; 3:59; 4:172; 43:59; 19:34; 43:57; 29:27; 19:17. The Qur'ānic equivalents in John of Damascus's writings is a subject that deserves a study of its own.

prophethood of Muhammad, and they included the pre-announcement of his previous prophets, as well as the performance of signs or miracles to prove his reliability.<sup>46</sup> At the time of John of Damascus, the question of the prophethood of Muhammad had not yet been sharpened by either side. The tendency of John of Damascus is rather to ridicule the Muslims for accepting Muhammad as a prophet, and to present him as a misguided person.

7. He refutes the name *Hetaeristae* ("Associators" – *mushrikūn*), which the Muslims attach to the Christians because of the doctrine of the Trinity, and he reverses the argument by calling the Muslims *Koptae* ("Mutilators") for impoverishing God of His Word and Spirit, as if God were "a stone or a piece of wood or some inanimate thing".<sup>47</sup> He also refutes the Muslim perception of the Christians as idolaters for honouring the cross and reverses the accusation once again against the Muslims for kissing and paying respect to the black stone in the Ka'ba.
8. Regarding matters of practice and conduct, he criticizes polygamy and he refers with contempt to the procedures of marriage and divorce. He mentions by name the Sūrah "Women"<sup>48</sup> as the Qur'ānic source of laws on marital matters. He refers to the particular case of Zaid's divorce,<sup>49</sup> and he criticizes what he sees as licentious sentiments that the Qur'ān cultivates among men towards women. In this particular instance he is actually quoting Qur'ānic passages and expressions.<sup>50</sup>
9. When he deals with Salih, the prophet and warner of the people of Thamud, he refers to a sūrah under the name "the camel of God". The closest resemblance of John of Damascus's account is to Sūrah 26:141–159. References to this prophet are scattered in the Qur'ān.<sup>51</sup>
10. He refers also by name to Sūrah 5 "The Table Spread" as well as to Sūrah 2 "The Cow".
11. In less than four lines, at the end, he outlines the main practices and prohibitions of Islam: circumcision (for men and women?); abolition of the Sabbath and of baptism; changes in the dietary laws and prohibition of drinking wine.<sup>52</sup>

46 On the question of miracles of Muhammad, see our "The Formation of later Islamic doctrines as a response to Byzantine polemics: The Miracles of Muhammad", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), 307–324, Chapter 4 in this volume.

47 Kotter, IV, pp. 63–64 (I. 75–76).

48 Sūrah 4. John of Damascus calls this sūrah "Woman".

49 Q 2:229–230.

50 Q 2:223.

51 Q 17:59; 26:154–158; 54:27 and others. See also Sahas, pp. 91–92.

52 Kotter, IV, p. 67 (II. 153–156).

While chapter 100 of the *Heresies* is a general introduction to Islam and an overview of the “heresy of the Ishmaelites”, the *Disputation* between a Saracen and a Christian is an intellectual, theological exchange.

As we mentioned earlier, the works of John of Damascus were translated early into Arabic and presumably were extensively utilized by Arabic-speaking Christian ecclesiastics and theologians. To what extent the literary work of John of Damascus, and especially his *Fount of Knowledge* (which is a compendium of Biblical teachings and of Patristic thought), provided also the Arab *Muslim* theologians with an easy access to Eastern Christian theology as well as to a model of an Aristotelian systematization of the doctrine, and whether the Damascene’s writings had any demonstrable influence on Islamic theology, is very difficult to ascertain.<sup>53</sup> One may be struck, however, by the resemblance between al-Ash’ari’s (873 or 883–941) major systematic work *Al-Maqālāt al-Islāmīyyīn*<sup>54</sup> and John of Damascus’s *Fount of Knowledge*. Both these systematic doctrinal works are sub-divided into three sections with almost identical headings, discussed in a different order! The *Maqālāt* is divided into: I. The Muslim sects; II. The creed of the Orthodox Community; III. The concepts of *kalām*. The *Fount* is divided into: I. The Philosophical Chapters; II. The Heresies; III. On the Orthodox Faith.<sup>55</sup> A persistent general view is that John of Damascus influenced particularly the Qadariyya movement on the question of free will. Aziz Atiya maintains that,

it is not unlikely that the swing of the pendulum from early Islamic predestinarianism to the liberalism of Mu’tazilite free thought must have opened the minds to the acceptance of some of St. John’s arguments that God’s directive power in all things could not eliminate man’s power over his actions for which he bore his own responsibility. This is apparently the Qadarite view which doubtlessly was in existence and became accepted in St. John’s age.<sup>56</sup>

If the whole “Qadari” discussion began in Syria toward the end of the seventh century, as A.S. Tritton suggests,<sup>57</sup> then its development coincides with

53 For a well-documented discussion of this topic, see Wolfson, pp. 58–64 and *passim*.

54 Published in Istanbul in 1348/1928. See M.M. Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963, vol. 1, p. 223.

55 Obviously the corresponding sections in the two works are M(aqālāt) I = F(ount) II; M II = F III; M III = F I. On the place of the book of *Heresies* in the *Fount of Knowledge* and its manuscript tradition, see Sahas, pp. 51–60.

56 “St. John Damascene”, pp. 76–77.

57 *Muslim Theology*, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1947, pp. 54f.

the active life of John of Damascus in the Umayyad court. One may possibly wonder whether the alleged disgrace into which John of Damascus fell with the caliphs was not because of the general climate of rising Arab nationalism,<sup>58</sup> but more precisely because it was felt that John of Damascus' thought was supporting a theological position, namely that of the Qadarites, which at the time had clear political connotations:<sup>59</sup> if man is a free agent of his works, then the caliphs are responsible for their actions and cannot protect themselves behind the popular and fundamentalist view that God has predetermined everything. The Umayyad caliphs found solace in the Murji'ite position – a middle position between the Qadarites and the Jabrites calling for a “postponement of judgement”. This moderate position gave a breathing space to an administration, which allegedly had deviated from the path of the simple religion of Islam and was getting consumed by secularism, enjoyment of material goods, power and extravagance. It is not coincidental that the main Qadarite spokesman and contemporary to John of Damascus, Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), was primarily an ascetic. Where the Qadarite theology failed significantly to challenge, as a movement, the Umayyad court and bring about a change in favour of a personal responsibility and accountability of the individual, earliest Sufism made at least an impressive dent in the general Islamic conscience with its practical asceticism. I am not claiming for a moment that John of Damascus influenced Islamic asceticism.<sup>60</sup> But he and his contemporary Qadarites, as well as the ascetics, all seem to be in the same vein of thought. When John of Damascus himself left the secularized Umayyad court, he followed “the straight path” (to use the Qur'anic expression of S. 1:5) of the monastic life in one of its most ascetic havens – Mar Sabbas, in the Judean desert!

### 3 The Treatment of Islam as a Christian Heresy

What has exercised the curiosity of many scholars is the fact that John of Damascus has treated Islam as a Christian heresy. But on a further and closer look one may want to observe that this statement, true though it might be, needs some qualification:

58 On this point, see Sahas, pp. 43–45.

59 See W.M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: at the University Press, 1964, p. 31.

60 The connection between primitive Islam and, later on, Sufism on the one hand and Eastern monasticism on the other, needs still a thorough examination.

- a) The word “heresy” in John of Damascus needs to be understood in a much broader sense than it is used today, as a deviation from main-stream orthodoxy<sup>61</sup> within a particular religious tradition. John of Damascus’s book of *Heresies* includes also such “heresies” as “Barbarism”, “Scythism”, “Hellenism” and “Judaism”.<sup>62</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to overemphasize the point that the *De haeresibus* is a book about *Christian* heresies.
- b) Barbarism, Scythism, Hellenism and Judaism are labelled and introduced as “mothers of heresies, and four prototypes for them”.<sup>63</sup> The implication behind this statement is, perhaps, that Christianity is not a source of any heresy – not even of those which one would call “Christian heresies” – and that the heresies are interpolations of non-Christian elements, beliefs and practices into the Christian tradition. Christianity is seen as the truth itself and as the criterion for judging all things that exist outside it; thus, the justification of the place of the book of *Heresies* as a preamble to the book *On the Orthodox Faith*.<sup>64</sup> The heresies are heresies insofar as they can be contrasted to Christianity. They are discussed in reference to Christianity, not independently of it; thus, the justification of treating Islam as a heresy, too.

V. Poggi finds my concluding remark that it is methodologically erroneous to reduce a religious tradition to the form of heresy of one’s own religion and then judge it from the vantage point of the stated orthodoxy, or of one’s own perspective, as valid, although he justifies John of Damascus’s effort as an apologist’s way to counterbalance tendencies to present Islam as dangerously “consonant”

61 “Orthodoxy”, beyond its etymological meaning, has certainly a phenomenological content which is much more encompassing and intricate in different religious traditions and experiences. For example, “Orthodoxy” in Islam is actually an “orthopraxis” (*Sunni*). In Judaism “Orthodoxy” means rather retention of traditional ritual and law. In Christianity, “Orthodoxy” referring to the Orthodox Church means “upright”, balanced faith and worship. This is a much more meaningful and encompassing idea that the one that connotes, erroneously, conservatism or fundamentalism.

62 *Heresies*, #1, 2, 3, 4, 5–8 are Greek philosophical schools; #9–20 are Jewish ethnic and religious groups. The first section of the book includes twenty heresies from the time *before* Christ. Poggie relates Epiphanius’ and John of Damascus’ classification of the heresies under Barbarism, Scythism, Hellenism and Judaism to Col. 3:11 (“Quel trattato suppone la suddivisione, fondata su un versetto paolino, die Barbarismo, Scitismo, Ellenismo e Giudaismo, cui tutte le eresie farabbero capo). *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 38 (1972), 515–16. However, Col. 3:11 includes also “circumcised” and “uncircumcised”, slaves and free men which are not heresies as such.

63 Kotter, IV, p. 19.

64 See John of Damascus’ Introduction to his *The Fount of Knowledge*, and Epiphanius’ rationale for his *Panarion*. The *anakephalaioses* [recapitulations] of the *Panarion* constitute the basis of John of Damascus’ eighty first heresies.



with the Christian beliefs. However, we have no historical evidence of such tendencies in John of Damascus' time: nor of the fact that Islam, as Poggi states

cultivated such fertile ground through disputes concerning the Trinity and the nature of Christ, in order to exercise its political and economic pressures, and to attract followers.<sup>65</sup>

The Trinity and the two natures in Christ constitute fundamental Islamic objections which are firmly embedded in, and stated as such, in the Qur'an itself. These objections are part of the very identity, and possibly part of the cause for the inception, of Islam.

N.Q. King also has expressed some interesting views on the subject: While the earliest Fathers "tried to understand, to discuss and to win over their heretical opponents", it was otherwise with the great heresiologists like Hippolytus, Irenaeus and Epiphanius. By branding religious opponents as heretics, the latter delivered them to a worse fate than Jews or pagans in a State which had taken the matter of religion and religious orthodoxy into its hands. He writes:

It is possible to assert that the logical outcome of this way of thought would have been for St. John and his followers to have had no further dialogue with Islam but to have pinned their hope on a re-assertion of Christian political power.<sup>66</sup>

But the political realities in the Arab-occupied Syria and the other Eastern Byzantine provinces were too well-known to John of Damascus, and his own idiosyncrasy too independent, for him to have relied on any hope of Christian political supremacy and thus to have shut down any dialogue with the Arab Muslims forever.

King also remarks that,

We may suppose that classifying Islam as a Christian heresy contributed something to the break-down of discussion. More probably political and social circumstances forced upon the Greek Fathers the acceptance of a kind of "apartheid", which remained the *status quo* even when the Turks replaced "the Saracens".<sup>67</sup>

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65 See Poggi's review of Sahas' book in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 38 (1972), 516.

66 "St. Joannis Damasceni de Haeresibus cap LI and Islam", *Studia Patristica* 8 (1966), 81.

67 *Ibid.*

However, the evidence shows that John of Damascus' treatment of Islam did not end but rather fanned the dialogue with Islam. The subsequent byzantine literature on Islam does not point to any "apartheid" policy or attitude, but rather to a tendency for dialogue, even a spirited one. The assessment of the situation during the Umayyad period and the intellectual frame of mind in Syria at the time is more perceptively depicted by Robert M. Haddad. He holds that only during the almost one hundred years of *Arab* Muslim monarchy of the Umayyads did Syria enjoy an intellectual and social florescence. This is partly, if not wholly, due to the latitudinarian atmosphere of the Umayyad Syria, which was even more so than "under the official Orthodoxy of Byzantium and possibly more latitudinarian than any time until the period following the first World War".<sup>68</sup> It is to this latitudinarian atmosphere, in religious doctrine and expression, that Haddad ascribes John of Damascus' understanding of Islam as a heresy:

So far indeed was the Muslim community from achieving its intellectual distinct identity that the last of the great Syrian Christian doctors, St. John of Damascus (d. 748), could regard Islam more or less as another Christian heresy.<sup>69</sup>

Haddad sees as important the fact that the Umayyad dynasty and the Damascene died within two years of each other!

John of Damascus did not write chapter 100 of the *Heresies* as a blueprint or manual for a Christian dialogue with Islam, in the modern sense of the word "dialogue". And even though the *Disputation* is in the form of a dialogue, this was written as a tool for the defense of Christians when confronted by, or confronting, Muslims on religious matters. One must partially agree with John Meyendorff's observation that in a final analysis "in the entire literary production the refutation of Islam occupies only five pages".<sup>70</sup> Indeed, from an active life in Damascus, in the midst of a Muslim community, he withdrew to the monastery of Mar Sabbas where he spent the major part of his life. It was from there that he wrote almost the entire body of his literature, including the pieces on Islam!

68 *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society: An Interpretation*. N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 11.

69 *Ibid.*, 11–12.

70 Meyendorff in reviewing Sahas' *John of Damascus* refers only to ch. 100 of the *Heresies* and does not take into account the *Disputation* and its value. *St. Vladimir's Seminar Quarterly* 17 (1973), 252.

Given all this, however, still one cannot disregard his years in Damascus, which coincide with those of the Umayyad caliphate; his initial education in “the books of the Saracens”; his companionship with the Arab Christian poet Akhtal and Caliph Yazid; and most importantly, his service in the Umayyad administration as *logothetes*, for at least twenty years! All this too is part of his “dialogue” with Islam. However, the most significant consideration is the fact that John of Damascus’ *short* writings on Islam have had indeed a very *long* history, as well as a *profound* influence upon other Christian writers who dealt with or wrote about Islam. His exposition of Islam made Islam known to the Christian community and, therefore, made interfaith “dialogue” part of the history and the development of Islam as well as of Christianity!

## Islam in the Context of John of Damascus' Life and Literary Production

In reviewing my *John of Damascus on Islam, the "heresy" of the Ishmaelites*,<sup>1</sup> the late Fr. John Meyendorff (1926–1992) made the bold remark that, in John of Damascus' "entire literary production the refutation of Islam occupies only five pages"<sup>2</sup> – an oblique critique perhaps that, placed in a wider and more comprehensive context, a whole dissertation or monograph the subject might be an exaggeration. He was right. Islam, indeed, occupies a very small part in John of Damascus' literary corpus; seemingly. Because this small piece of writing<sup>3</sup> and two versions of a *Disputatio* of a Christian with a Muslim<sup>4</sup> have been in continuous use in scholarship and made a deep impression on history, in spite of the fact that both have raised questions of authenticity.<sup>5</sup> As in many cases, it is not volume itself but historical context, stature of an author, originality, sobriety and scholarship, innovation and wide recognition, which render an author and a piece of his writing significant and memorable. Continuous research on John of Damascus keeps illuminating aspects of his life and writing on Islam,<sup>6</sup> confirming his stature as a most significant Father

1 Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972.

2 *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 17 (1973), p. 252.

3 Chapter 100/1 of his *De Haeresibus*, PG 94:764–773. Critical edition by Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. IV. *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 60–7; henceforth, Kotter IV.

4 PG 96:1336–48, 1596–7. Kotter IV, 426–38.

5 Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, 60–66, 99–102; Reinhold Glei and Adel Theodor Khoury's, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra. Schriften zum Islam* (Corpus Islamo-Christianum, series graeca 3; Würzburg and Altenberge, 1995), 38–43; Robert G. Hoyland's, *Seeing Islam as others saw it. A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, N.J. 1997), pp. 485, 489.

6 The scholarly interest in John of Damascus on Islam remains strong, although not always original, or easy to follow. A new edition of the relevant texts has appeared, with a translation in French by Raymond Le Coz, *Jean Damascène: écrits sur l'Islam* (Paris: Sources chrétiennes 383, 1992); and in German by Glei and Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra. Schriften zum Islam*. My own interest in John of Damascus remains undiminished and never fulfilled. In addition to my monograph, I have elaborated further on the topic in my "John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited". *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984–1985), pp. 104–118 (See Chapter 18 in this volume), and in "The Arab character of the Christian disputation with Islam. The case of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)", in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. Bernard

of the Church at the dawn of Islam, and beyond, as well as his centrality in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. One could safely say that John of Damascus cannot be adequately studied and understood apart from the study of the history of early Islam.

His life (placed in rounded decades *ca.* 650–*ca.*750) was from the beginning interwoven with, and conditioned by Islam. He came into contact, and to terms, with an aggressive Islam. The climate that prevailed during his life was one of violence, of the beginning of the era of the anti-Christ because of the Muslim expansion, and of an unequivocal sense of a state-protected Orthodoxy coming to an end! We cannot overstate as we might not have taken seriously these radically new socio-political factors, or adequately pondered on such psychological circumstances, under which John of Damascus lived and wrote. Thus with this presentation we want to suggest, at least experimentally, a different approach and perhaps a kind of reversal of emphasis: from the well trotted topic of “John of Damascus on Islam”, to the consideration of the role which Islam played on John of Damascus, and the effect it may have

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Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 185–205 (See Chapter 21 in this volume). Two more pieces on *Damascenica* may be of related interest, “Υλη and φύσις in John of Damascus's *Orations in defence of the icons*”. Ed. E. Livingstone, *Studia Patristica* vol. xxiii (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989), pp. 66–73; and “Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad period. The “circle” of John of Damascus”. *ARAM Periodical* (Oxford/Leuven) 6 (1994), pp. 35–66 (See Chapter 20 in this volume). Selectively also, I would mention Marie France Auzépy, “De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII<sup>e</sup>–IX<sup>e</sup> siècles): Etienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène”, *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), pp. 183–218; P. Cavinet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais eds., *La Syrie de byzance à l'Islam VII<sup>e</sup>–VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes du Colloque international Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris-Institut du Monde Arabe, 11–15 Septembre 1990* (Damas, 1992). Special mention should be made to Robert G. Hoyland's work, *Seeing Islam as others saw it* which, with an exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary sources up to its publication, a comprehensive section on John of Damascus (pp. 480–9) and many cross references to him, a magisterial work on the early period of Christian literature on Islam. Andrew Louth's, *St. John Damascene: tradition and originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002), although not on the specific topic it is nevertheless a much welcome scholarly contribution to Damascene studies by an expert in the field. In preparing this presentation I had no access to Pim Valkenberg's article, “John of Damascus and the theological identity vis-à-vis early Islam” in *Jaarboek 2000* of the Thomas Instituut in Utrecht. The article of Igor Pochoshajew, “Johannes von Damaskos: De Haeresibus 100”, *Islamochristiana* 30 (2004), pp. 65–75 is far too general on the topic and defective in its Greek references. An article by John E. Merrill, “Of the tractate of John of Damascus on Islam” ([//answering-islam.org.uk/Books/MW/john\\_d.htm](http://answering-islam.org.uk/Books/MW/john_d.htm) published perhaps elsewhere before), is an interesting and well-documented piece of work with a very specific focus in mind: to show (unconvincingly though) that John of Damascus did not know in detail even the four suras of the Qur'an which he cites. Alexander Kariotoglou's article, “The Rise of Orthodoxy's Encounter with Islam”, *Pacifica* 17 (2004), pp. 170–83, although it revolves around a more general axis, surprisingly enough it does not even mention the name of John of Damascus!

had on his life, character, and literary production. In other words asking the questions, “What did the factor *Islam* mean for and do to him?”, “What kind of priorities, challenges, and defences did the dominance of Islam arise in him and in his fellow Christians?”, “In what direction did Islam perhaps lead his life, and shape his character?”

The rise and expansion of Islam in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire brought about traumatic personal and community experiences in the middle seventh and eighth century; those were times of cosmogony for the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Holy Land, Egypt, and Syria, this broader epicentre of theological thought and spiritual expression of the Christian East during earlier times, had now fallen into Muslim hands. The difference in treatment of land and populations between capitulation and violent conquest notwithstanding (a matter of cosmetics rather than of substance), the political, religious, cultural and ideological balance had, for this part of the Byzantine Empire, shifted precariously on the extreme edge of extinction. The region for all practical purposes had now become *dār al-Islām*. For the common people everyday life, except after conversion, had become a matter of survival marked by captivity, oppression, terror, and even death.<sup>7</sup> John of Damascus, living and writing within the context of a conquering Islam, allows us a glimpse of sentiment when he speaks, even not as a historian, of the “prevailing heresy” (or “cult”) of the Ishmaelites”, which in no ambiguous terms characterizes as “the forerunner of the anti-Christ!”<sup>8</sup> A general climate as this was not ignored by chronographers, historians, or hagiographers of the period, granted that they must be read with caution as they were writing much later and with an added emphasis.

The available sources of John of Damascus’ life, dating from the tenth century, are confusing, contradictory, and hagiological in character. They do pose serious problems of historical clarity and consistency, but they also offer a glimpse from within; they are a kind of literary “icons”, or doors of perception, which cannot be ignored. They are in themselves part of the phenomenon we are discussing. The fact that they start telling the story so late reflects

7 On the conquests and conversion with important bibliography, see the articles of Nehemiah Levtzion, “Conversion to Islam in Syria and Palestine and the Survival of Christian Communities”, in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, eds., *Conversion and Continuity. Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 289–311; and in the same volume of Richard W. Bulliet, “Conversion Stories in Early Islam”, pp. 123–133.

8 Kotter, iv, 60. The entire literature on early Islam, incidental or not, Christian and not, mirrors the historical and socio-political context of the times. On this score Hoyland’s *Seeing Islam* is an indispensable tool.

the adverse conditions prevailing in the former Eastern provinces after the Arab conquests and the difficulty of earlier authors to investigate their hero closely. The late date of *vitae* of the Damascene and of other contemporaries does not prove Christian forgetfulness of or alienation from their fathers and saints coming from the former provinces; on the contrary. The impressive body of *vitae* of John of Damascus and their multiple manuscript tradition speak of the imposing position the Damascene had been holding in the Christian conscience, and of its lasting memory.<sup>9</sup> The life of John of Damascus has been interwoven, in history and in literature, with that of another hymnographer Cosmas of Maiuma (ca. 674/6–ca.751/2), the Melodist, to the extent that in the *vitae* the latter appears overshadowed by the wider recognition of the former!<sup>10</sup>

One of the *vitae*, mainly of Cosmas with a small only portion on John of Damascus, from the 12th century *codex Atheniensis* 321 (ff. 10r–46r) and recently published,<sup>11</sup> albeit of ambiguous historical validity, offers some interesting phenomenological insights of the context and the person himself from the vantage point of drama and the miraculous, even for an Arab like John of Damascus as the *vita* wants him to be. Although eager “to narrate a God-pleasing life, to fill with pleasure the hearing of those who have reached a high level of spirituality, and to rise in a similar zeal [like that of the saints] to those who are still struggling to achieve the goal”,<sup>12</sup> its author is unable to get on with his main task before prefacing his story, as he says, with “the events of those times, which were *experiences of pain and beyond pain*”.<sup>13</sup> Cosmas of Maiouma is brought in touch with John of Damascus' family as a result of a

9 On the sources of life of John of Damascus, see G. Richter, *Johannes von Damaskos, Philosophischen Kapitel* (Eingeleitet, übersetzt und mit Erläuterungen versehen; Stuttgart, 1982), pp. 1–62; and Theocharis E. Detorakis, *Κοσμάς ὁ Μελωδός. Βίος καὶ Ἔργο* (Thessaloniki: Patriarchiko Idryma Paterikon Meleton, 1979), 17–80.

10 Cf. Detorakis, *Κοσμάς*, 3.

11 Foteini Kolovou, “Vita des Johannes von Damaskus und des Kosmas Melodos im Codex Atheniensis BN 321 (BHG<sup>3</sup> 884<sub>a</sub>)”, *Βυζαντινά* 23 (2002–2003), pp. 7–46, henceforth, *vita Atheniensis*. References will be given to the locus of the text in line numbers. This *vita* according to Detorakis is a bad copy of a similar document, the *vita* Chalkis. Cf. *Κοσμάς*, 17, and 65.

12 “βίον θεάρεστον διηγῆσασθαι καὶ τῶν φιλαρέτων τὰς ἀκοὰς τὰς μὲν ἐπ’ ἄκρον ἰούσας ἐφετὸν ἐνηδύναι, τὰς δ’ ἔτι κατὰ σκοπὸν ἐλαυνούσας πρὸς ζῆλον ἐπειγεῖραι τὸν ὁμοῖον”. *Vita Atheniensis*, pp. 90–2.

13 “τὰ μὲν οὖν τοῦ τότε καιροῦ, δεινά τε καὶ πέραν δεινῶν”, *vita Atheniensis*, 84; emphasis is ours. Another *vita* also, *vita Athoniensis Laurae* Γ44, makes a similar reference to “Hagar's grandsons” characterizing them as “utterly murderous, used to live a mostly predatory life” (“φονικωτάτων ὄντων καὶ ληστρικώτερον ζῆν εἰθισμένων ...”). Cf. Detorakis, *Κοσμάς*, 22.

disastrous Arab raid against Crete during which Cosmas was captured, miraculously saved from death, and transported to Damascus.<sup>14</sup>

This *vita* insists on John of Damascus' Arab national identity which other *vitae* reject. John of Damascus' national identity remains an issue shrouded in mystery, expressed in contradiction, and still under debate – as if everyone perceives co-existence of Arabic and Christian cultures in an Islamic context as impossibility and struggles to defend him for what he was and protect him from what he was not. Was he a Byzantine living in a Byzantine ghetto;<sup>15</sup> an Arab in the broadest sense;<sup>16</sup> or a Syrian in the immediate sense? And if this is not enough for complexity, this particular *vita* and the type C ones want John of Damascus' father, Mansur, to be a “barbarian” [an Arab?] and a Muslim till death, who employed Cosmas as his son's teacher with the explicit order to teach John everything he possessed “*except of making him a Christian*”;<sup>17</sup> thus making also John of Damascus originally a ... Muslim! Apparently he was at some later time converted to Christianity by Cosmas, his teacher. According also to this *vita*, it was because of the fervent prayers which Cosmas and John offered for Mansur for forty days after his death, that Mansur appeared to them and affirmed that he had found salvation posthumously while Muhammad was still burning in fire with all those who had followed him!<sup>18</sup> Tradition wants Mansur, let alone John of Damascus, to be “a venerable and pious”. That is why such a daring suggestion that Mansur and his son John were originally Muslims has been rejected outright as absurd, and the author of this *vita* and of the *vita* Chalkis who have adopted this suggestion, have been castigated as ignorant,

14 Cf. *vita Atheniensis*, 73–88. Obviously the *vita* is referring to a raid that preceded that of the conquest of Crete (ca. 824). On the conquest of Crete, see Vassilios Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824) a Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984).

15 John Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views on Islam”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), 117–8. Detorakis has identified three types of *vitae* of Cosmas and of John of Damascus. Those of type A make him an *Hagiopolite* that is from Jerusalem, or a Byzantine; those of type B speak of him as *Scillian*, while those of type C, like the *vita Atheniensis*, make Cosmas teacher of John of Damascus being from *Crete*. Cf. *Κοσμάς*, 54.

16 Hoyland doubts, or at least questions, his being raised in an Arab milieu because of his violent references to the Ishmaelites as “barbarian born and slaughter-loving dogs”. *Seeing Islam*, 480, n. 83.

17 “βούλομαι οὖν σε πλὴν τοῦ ποιῆσαι χριστιανὸν τὰλλα πάντα σοφίσει τὰ κατὰ σέ”. *Vita Atheniensis*, 288–9. Emphasis is ours. See also the equivalent statement of another type C *vita*, *vita Chalkis*: “θέλω δέ, χωρὶς τοῦ γενέσθαι χριστιανόν, τὰλλα πάντα ποιῆσαι καὶ διδάξαι αὐτὸν κατὰ σέ γενέσθαι”. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας* (Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), v. IV, pp. 271–302, at 273:20–1.

18 *Vita Atheniensis* 425–7, 429–30; 435–9 and 455–6.



deceived ones, liars, and fraudulent!<sup>19</sup> Imaginative and unhistorical though this version might be, it points to a widely held perception that there was an intimate and authoritative relationship between John of Damascus and Islam! Who else, then, would know Islam better than a prominent former Muslim, convert to Christianity, who died as a ... martyr? What is closest to the primary identity of John of Damascus is that he was a *Byzantine* (or, *Romaïos*), with all the weight and comprehensiveness of the term<sup>20</sup> – his nationality of birth and culture being a subsidiary one. In the seventh-eighth century, at least, the *Greek* character of the Byzantine Empire was less pronounced than in later centuries.<sup>21</sup>

The same *vita Atheniensis* repeats what other *vitae* also report, that it was John who pleaded with his father to employ Cosmas as his teacher so that he may become wise not only through the Saracene but through the books of the Greeks as well;<sup>22</sup> thus making John of Damascus fully immersed into the Arabic-Islamic and Greek education of the time, with the two cultures not in tension but supplementing each other. This is an inference to a cross cultural upbringing, important to be born in mind as we try to understand John of Damascus as a person and a writer. We should not allow the fact that he wrote only in Greek monopolize, sidetrack, or confuse the issue. By the tenth century most of his writings had been translated into Arabic.<sup>23</sup> John wrote in Greek, but he was thinking in Arabic; the accusation “Saracene-minded” (“σαράρακηνόφρων”) of the Council of Hieria, although meant to be negative and

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- 19 Cf. note on f. 92<sup>b</sup> of codex 13 of Monē Limonos, Lesvos (16th or 17th c.). Detorakis, *Κοσμάς*, 64.
- 20 For the use, meaning and implication of the terms, see Angeliki E. Laiou, *From “Roman” to “Helene”*. *The Byzantine Fellowship Lectures at Hellenic College*, no. 1, ed. Nomikos Michael Vapori (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Theological School Press, 1974).
- 21 From the rich literature on the emergence of the Greek-Byzantine nationalism, see selectively Héléne Ahrweiler, *L’idéologie politique de l’empire byzantin* (Paris: 1975), 61–64. The emergence of the Greek consciousness dates, according to A. Vakalopoulos, from 1204 and becomes evident from the middle of the fourteenth century. *The Origins of the Greek Nation: the Byzantine period, 1204–1461* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970), 28, and 36–38. For a full citation of sources of this later period, see Sophia Mergiali, *L’enseignement et les lettrés pendant d’époque des Paléologues (1261–1453)* (Αθήνα, 1996), pp. 96–97.
- 22 “ἵνα μὴ μόνον τὰς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν βίβλους ἀλλὰ πρὸς ταύτας καὶ τὰς τῶν Ἑλλήνων διδασθεὶς σοφισθήσομαι”. *Vita Atheniensis*, pp. 272–3.
- 23 George Graf, *Geschichte der byzantinischen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1 (Città del Vaticano, 1944), 378–9. Another *vita* of Cosmas of Maiumā presents John of Damascus’ father, unable to understand Greek and thus in need of a Greek translator. *Vita Athoniensis Laurae* ff. 150<sup>r</sup>–157<sup>v</sup>. Cf. Théocharis Detorakis, “Vie inédit de Cosmas le Mélode. BHG 394b”, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 99 (1981), pp. 101–116, at 109. On this *vita*, see also Detorakis, *Κοσμάς*, pp. 20–26.

politically offensive, affirms such a synthesis. Consequently his anti-Islamic treatises could be also perceived not as an attack against a culture which was also his own, but a rejection of a “heresy” of Arab (“Ishmaelite”) origin which was an aberration from morality, reason, and revelation. His criticism of Islam was coming to some extent from within; that is why it was specific, sober, based on facts, and of a practical nature. It is this phenomenon which makes John of Damascus a distinguished figure in the Christian (more precisely, Byzantine) anti-Islamic literature and in the history of Muslim-Christian relations in general. It is our view that doubting John of Damascus’ upbringing in an *Arabic* family environment, including his knowledge of Arabic, must be set aside as no source denies it and every source implies it, or takes it for granted. We can, also, safely say (unless one wants to dismantle the reality in Damascus and in Palestine, as well as the personality of John of Damascus and his literary tradition) that it was not mainly the Arabs as such but Islam that incensed him, as did any “heresy”, or “cult” – or “religion” for that matter. To such categories John of Damascus juxtaposed the trans-cultural event of [Orthodox] “faith” (πίστις) which alone authenticates human identity and true relationship with God.

More than an average person, John of Damascus was part and product of such events, trends, and circumstances of his times. His father served as secretary to Mu‘āwiya I (661–680), Yazīd I (680–683), Marwān I (684–685).<sup>24</sup> Arabic sources, an Arabic biography and, borrowed from this, the Greek *vitae* make John of Damascus also himself a prime minister (γενικός λογοθέτης), chief advisor (πρωτοσύμβουλος), minister, or spokesman (λογία) of the “ruler of Damascus”, possibly of ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705) and Walid I (705–715), a position for which he earned from the people the Arabic title *amir*!<sup>25</sup> He knew, therefore, about centres of authority and gravity in society which he confronted on the Byzantine-Christian and on the Arab-Muslim level as well. The Acts of the II Nicea (787) are cognizant of his early professional position. By comparing him to Matthew, the tax collector, and stating that he preferred “the shame of Christ [i.e. monasticism] to the treasures of Arabia,” they infer to a comfortable life in the Umayyad court and to a financial position of sorts.<sup>26</sup> Earlier he had spent a life of merriment with Akhtāl (n. ca. 640), the Christian Arab poet, and with prince Yazid who later became a caliph as Yazid II

24 Sources cited by Hoyland, 481, n. 87.

25 Cf. *vita* in Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ανάλεκτα*, vol. IV, 272.

26 Mansi, XIII:357. Was he a collector of taxes from the Christian community in Damascus only (not an insignificant assignment in itself), or a minister with some wider financial responsibilities?

(720–724).<sup>27</sup> Serving at a financial post at the time of Arab domination was not for him an escape nor, obviously, comforting to the Christian community; more so if an hypothesis that he served also as a minister of war at the time of Muslim expansion remains tenable!<sup>28</sup> Such adverse and contradictory conditions must have been seen as an expression of what the author of the *vita Atheniensis* calls “the economy of God loving mankind”!<sup>29</sup>

This is the other view of the context of John of Damascus' life: the challenge presented to the Christian community to read and respond to the economy of God's love in the midst of oppressive times. Such a challenge produced a sense of destiny, an eagerness to live and witness to the Christian Orthodox ethos in the midst of adversity, and a climate of profound spirituality. In the context of John of Damascus' life Islam from outside and Iconoclasm from within provided the Christian empire, and in particular its Eastern provinces, with a singular opportunity for a remarkable growth. During this period lives of saints and martyrs abound, reverence for anything sacred is profusely cherished and demonstrated, worship and prayer are intensified, asceticism (and intellectual asceticism at that) is flourishing, and foundations for a new and vigorous religious expressions such as poetry, hymnography and dogmatic literature are laid – something which anything but “dark ages” can be characterized. The characterization of the seventh-ninth century period as the “dark ages” of Byzantium (with very narrow and material criteria in mind, such as the destruction of cities), although progressively fainting, it is still persisting.<sup>30</sup> Not discounting the Eastern provinces from Byzantium because of their fall into Arab domination, and not disregarding the cultural and spiritual growth which the ideological challenge of Islam brought about, as most of Byzantinists do, the seventh-ninth century period can be certainly defended as “a time of fundamental transformation throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Balkan world” in a positive sense.<sup>31</sup> In such an intense and contradictory context John

27 Cf. Joseph Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas. Son époque, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, Office des Éditions Universitaires, 1950), pp. 66–7. A monograph on Akhtāl was most recently published by Stefanie Brinkman, *Al-Ahtal – Dichter der Umayyaden* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2005).

28 Cf. Jawad Boulos, *Les peuples et les civilisations de Proche Orient*, vol. IV: *De l'expansion Arabo-Islamique à la conquête Turco-Ottomane (640–1517)* (La Hague, 1964), 248; and Sahas, “John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited”, 106–7.

29 Cf. *vita Atheniensis*, 95.

30 Cf. Eleonora Kountoura-Galaki ed., *Οί σκοτεινοί αἰῶνες τοῦ Βυζαντίου (7<sup>ος</sup>–9<sup>ος</sup> αἰ.)* (Athens: Ethniko Idryma Ereunon. Institutouto Byzantinon Ereunon, 2001).

31 John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Daniel J. Sahas, “The Seventh Century in the Byzantine-Muslim Relations. Characteristics and Forces”. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2 (1991), pp. 3–22; *idem.*, “Eighth-century Byzantine

of Damascus' own life, example and contribution are of a defining order. No full and accurate biography of his and of his contemporary intellectuals and spiritual masters, with these considerations in mind, has yet been produced. Until then this has to be left to one's own imagination and, as with his latter biographers-hagiographers, to one's hidden admiration.

The challenges and problematics of John of Damascus' times were huge and of political, moral, and spiritual nature. To those challenges various events and forces were offering their own answers and were shaping the direction of history. For John of Damascus Islam was one of these forces on the political and religious level; Iconoclasm and Manichaeism were the other on the personal, moral, and spiritual level. All three, Islam, Iconoclasm and Manichaeism, were forming a whole. The sharp dichotomy between material and holy which all three imposed, applied equally to icons as it did to Christology. For John of Damascus matter (*ὑλη*) made of God, was never worthless and without honour (*ἄτιμος*) as it was for the iconoclasts; this was a Manichaean way of thinking.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Islam with its belief in a new prophet represented a popular, grass-root, movement which was confronting Christianity head on. For John of Damascus Islam was not so much a new "religion" (something which Christians could probably face) but an insidious challenge and assault on popular faith.<sup>33</sup> The key claim of Islam that a new prophet has appeared after Christ (to announce what?, since God-the-Word had already come in flesh?), and the fact that Islam had so much to say about Jesus as one of the prophets and a mere human, questioned the very lordship of Christ. That is why John of Damascus, Abū Qurra (*ca.*750–*ca.*820) and the subsequent apologists counter attacked and concentrated on the person, the ethics and the prophethood of Muhammad. John of Damascus understood the danger of comparing and equating Jesus with Muhammad and gave the signal for an assault against such a comparison. This Christian reaction to the Islamic challenge brought about an intense investigation on the part of the Muslims into the Old Testament, considered by the Christians as an inspired scripture,<sup>34</sup> in an effort of find-

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anti-Islamic literature. Context and forces", *Byzantinoslavica* 57 (1996), pp. 229–238, and *idem.*, "Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad period. The "circle" of John of Damascus" (see Chapters 16, 17 and 20 in this volume).

32 Cf. Kotter, III, 88, 90, and 104–5. Cf. also, Sahas, "'Υλη and φύσις".

33 There are several characterizations of Islam as an insidious, sneaky, demonic heresy aiming at misleading the simple people away from the faith in Christ. Cf. in chapter 100/1 of the *De Haeresibus* expressions such as: "deceptive superstition" (*λαοπλάνος σκεία*); by pretence [Muhammad] made the people think ... (*προφάσει τὸ δοκεῖν ...*); calling falsely (*ψευδοηγοροῦντες*); he [Muhammad] composed many idle tales (*πολλὰς ληρωδίας συντάξας*).

34 Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 55.

ing support to Muhammad's prophethood, and this within a century after the death of John of Damascus.

Another challenge which Islam posed on the faith of the populace, integrally related to the first, was the Muslim offense against the validity of the Christian scriptures on account of their alleged state of corruption (*tahrif*); only because the Christians had corrupted their scriptures were unable to recognize Muhammad as a prophet! Thus, the oral, extemporaneous and liturgical resort to and rehearsal of the Bible (actually of the written Tradition of Christianity about the incarnate Word of God) was now challenged by an Islamic literalism. The Muslim accusation of *tahrif* offended not only the integrity of the Christian scriptures as such, but the very method as well by which the Christian populace had been instructed and survived spiritually thus far. *Tahrif* had to do with four "sins": that the Christians were not reading their scriptures *correctly*; that they were *hiding* parts of them; that they were *distorting* willingly their text and meaning; and that they were not reading the text *as a whole*. The Church, as well as the Church Fathers and spiritual pastors, whose purpose was to re-enact the Word and to instruct rather than to dictate and quote, fully versed themselves into the scriptures, used the text in a dynamic oral way; a process which fitted exactly the Muslim perception of "corruption"! The immediate and existential character of the Christian scriptures was challenged at the heart by the Islamic offense of *tahrif*; thence the direct refutation of the notion by John of Damascus and his counter-attack in Chapter 100/1 on the frivolous character and content of the Qur'ān.

Notwithstanding his acknowledged Aristotelian philosophical acumen John of Damascus was, and remained (in line with the tradition of the Christian East till the eighteenth century), a "practical" and pastoral theologian rather than a scholastic one. His *opus magnum*, *Fount of Knowledge* (*Πηγή Γνώσεως*), in three parts, and not only its third part "On the Orthodox Faith" (*Ἐκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, *De Fide Orthodoxa*), is in fact a combination of dogmatics and ethics. Even the first part, the "Philosophical Chapters" (*Κεφάλαια Φιλοσοφικά*, *Capita Philosophica*), aim at serving the practical purpose of familiarizing the reader with the philosophical terminology and notions which Christian doctrine employs. The second part, "On the Haeresies" (*Περὶ Αἱρέσεων*, *De Haeresibus*), wants to familiarize the reader with what is heretical in order to be able to distinguish what is Orthodox and differentiate true from false. The introductory statement in the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, "Ἐρῶ τοιγαροῦν ἑμὸν οὐδέν" (I will say nothing of my own),<sup>35</sup> is less an expression of modesty and more a statement of theological and moral meaning; it affirms the annulable nature

35 PG 94: 533A.

of dogma and the integrity of Tradition. In an age in which the Christian community was now called to live under a different rule, and faith, there could be no better tool and manual of the Christian faith (in which there were also included the contemporary “heresies” of Iconoclasm and of Islam) that could be provided. Islam gave, perhaps, to John of Damascus the best opportunity and the strongest impetus to write this work!

More than a “dogmatic” theologian, John of Damascus (a combination of a didactic, spiritual, apologetic, and pastoral Father of the Church) became known as a hymnographer. Church singing at monasteries, to which the generation of John of Damascus made a lasting contribution, seems to have been at infancy, if not a novelty.<sup>36</sup> The situation on the parish level in the world might not have been very different. The *vita Atheniensis* makes John of Damascus and Cosmas not only authors of hymns for feast and memorial days of saints but also authorities responsible for establishing the order of hymns, the different tones, and their singing on different occasions. Thus, thanks to John of Damascus the Church “is clothed with the singing of hymns of salvation” and its services are “rendered with a firmer and more definite order as it is proper to her”;<sup>37</sup> and this contribution was neither of a small aesthetic, pastoral and pedagogical significance, nor unrelated to the religious landscape in which the Christian community of the East was called to live. Looking at his life as a whole, his literary production of hymns, homilies on Church feasts and feasts of saints, as well as orations on the icons, one could say that John of Damascus was driven principally by a Theology which was a *liturgical* Theology.<sup>38</sup> For John of Damascus the Church is a worshiping, liturgical, body. I am suggesting that the brief writings on Islam which bear John of Damascus’ name, heresiological though they may be, they could and should be read contextually under the light of his ethical and liturgical Theology. In reading carefully chapter C1

36 There seems to be evidence that up to 550 there were no hymns sung at church at the monastery of Sinai, something which surprised greatly the itinerant John Moschus and his companion Sophronius, the later Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638). The fifth-century Egyptian abbot Pambo had ridiculed singing at church by asking rhetorically, “what kind of contrition could there be when the monk stands in his church or cell and raises his voice like the oxen?” We can take the anecdote with a grain of salt, but it is indicative of a certain attitude towards Church singing. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 107.

37 « ... ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅθεν ἐρρῦν τὰ φαῦλα, ἐκεῖθεν πηγάζει τὰ κρείττονα. καὶ τί λέγω ταῦτα· οὐ μόνον ἐκ τούτων ἢ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐκκλησία τὴν τῶν σωτηρίων ἀσμάτων ὧδὴν ἐναρμόνιον περιβάλλεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τάξιν καθίσταται τὴν καθήκουσαν καὶ τὴν ἐδραιωτέραν λαμβάνει παγίωσιν ... » 545–8 through 569, and 589. See also an equally definitive evidence of the hymnographic and musical contribution of John and Cosmas in the *vita* of Chalkis. Cf. Detorakis, *Κοσμάς*, 59–60.

38 Cf. Sahas, “Cultural interaction”, esp. pp. 49–53.

of the *De Haeresibus* on Islam one notices his preoccupation with the ritual, or “liturgical”, expression which the author notices also in the “heresy of the Ishmaelites”. In this chapter John of Damascus devotes a major portion to matters of prayer and ritual. He illuminates for us the understanding of the words *Khabar*, *Khobar*, or *Koubar*, he lists the ritual practices of the Ishmaelites and perhaps he makes for the first time an oblique inference to the *ritual* use of the Qurʾān!<sup>39</sup> John of Damascus seems to be contrasting indirectly Islam as *skeia* or cult driven by ritual, to Christianity as faith (πίστις) expressed in worship.<sup>40</sup> The word “cult” points to ritual acts which play a central role in the life and faith of a religious group.<sup>41</sup> John of Damascus, himself a priest and a monk, must have been impressed by the regularity, punctuality and intensity of Muslim prayer of the night and day, imitating or being influenced by the monastic practice,<sup>42</sup> and by the ritual accompanying Islamic life. Isn’t washing before prayer, fasting, observance of holy days, circumcision, abstention from wine, and other practices, expressions of a ritual life? It is only surprising that John of Damascus did not make any explicit comment on the “monastic”

39 « ... Τινὰ οὖν συντάγματα ἐν τῷ παρ’ αὐτοῦ βιβλίῳ χαράξας γέλωτος ἄξια, τὸ σέβας [our emphasis] αὐτοῖς παραδίδωσι ». PG 94:765A. With some exaggeration perhaps, Hoyland has rendered the words τὸ σέβας as “... *this form of worship*”. *Seeing*, p. 486. I would be inclined to stand by my translation that, “he [Muhammad] handed it [the book, the Qurʾān] down to them *in order that they may comply with it*” (*John of Damascus on Islam*, 133) in order to maintain the fundamentally legal nature of the Qurʾān as a testament of conduct rather, than a manual or an object of “worship”. In any case, I find Hoyland’s suggestion intriguing! The ritual use of the Qurʾān has been preserved especially at funerals and at other congregational occasions.

40 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 488, n. 114.

41 In a recent international symposium entitled “Cult and Art in Byzantium” – “Λατρεία καὶ Τέχνη στό Βυζάντιο”, Volos, Greece, 24–26 June, 2005) several participants questioned the appropriateness of translation of “Λατρεία” as “Cult” (instead of “Worship”). Most of them, however, agreed that the word “cult”, barring its negative usage, contains a broader concept which includes, and is characterized by, acts of ritual and “worship”. Cf. also Daniel J. Sahas, “The Notion of “Religion” with reference to Islam in the Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature”. In *The Notion of “Religion” in Comparative Research. Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990*. Ed. Ugo Bianchi (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1994), pp. 523–530 (see Chapter 1 in this volume).

42 The profound influence which Eastern monasticism exercised on Muhammad and the earliest Muslims, with permanent manifestation on the entire Islam, has not yet been adequately considered. I have tried to make a first assessment in my “Monastic ethos and spirituality and the origins of Islam”. In *Acts XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Selected Papers: Main and Communications*. Eds. Iho Ševčenko and Gennady G. Litavrin (Shepherdstown, WV, 1996), vol. 11, pp. 27–39 (see Chapter 5 in this volume).

characteristics of Islamic ritual life (prostrations, frequent prayers night and day, washing, fasting, vigils etc).

In the context of ethical Theology John of Damascus connected Islam with Manichaeism, on which he wrote extensively.<sup>43</sup> In Islam he noticed a revival of Manichaeism with regard to the question of good and evil, their source and nature. Neither the dualism of Manichaeism nor the dynamic monarchianism of Islam could provide an adequate and meaningful response to the human question as to what is good and what is evil, and why to pursue the one and avoid the other. Each tradition held a firm but differing position on the issue. For Manichaeism evil has an existence and hypostasis of its own with no relationship to human reality. For Islam the will of God, as the will of the supreme Being and the creator of all, is no subject to characterization as either “good” or “evil”, thus freeing humans from any responsibility when they obey divine will. There are obvious moral implications to these answers which do not energize directly human responsibility. The response which each tradition gave to this question did not seem to take into account the notion of integrity of the human *αὐτεξούσιον*, or self-power and responsibility, wrongly perceived and dealt with by Western theology as a question of “freedom of will”. For John of Damascus and Orthodox theology the question of good and evil is a moral question, whose answer ought to be sought in the Christian anthropology, in the integral affinity of man with God, and in the exercise of human freedom and self-power. Christian theology had a special message to offer to this human quest. It had made the *αὐτεξούσιον* a central issue, in the context of human nature, and Patristic thought (especially Fathers from the Eastern provinces who were challenged by dualistic theology and ethics) had elaborated early on the notion. One of the earliest theologians on the subject is Nemesius bishop of Emesa (late 4th c.) whose treatise *On the nature of Man* was much utilized by John of Damascus.<sup>44</sup> It is this kind of debate that influenced directly the

43 *Διάλεξις πρὸς Μανιχαῖον*, PG, 94:1505–84; 96: 1319–36. Manichaeism had challenged the Christian faith and ethics long before John of Damascus, and it did so after him as well; the PG list of anti-Manichaean writings is indicative: [Hegemonius], 10:1105–1528; Alexander Lycopol., 18:411–48; Titus Bostrensis, 18:1069–1264; Basilius, 31:329–54; Didymus Alexandr., 39:1085–1110 (= Gregorius Nyssenus, 46:541–2); Serapion Thumuit., 40:899–924; Epiphanius, 42:66, 29–172; Zacharias Mitzl., 85:1143–4; Anonymous, 88:529–78; Johannes Damascenus, 94:1505–84, 96:1319–36; Photius, 102:15–264; Petrus Siculus, 104:1239–1304, *Sermones* 1–3, 1305–50; Michael Psellus, 122:819–76, 130:7:24. John of Damascus is one of the most prolific writers on the subject. In the *De Haeresibus* the chapter on the Massalians (no. 80, PG 94:728–737) is longer than CI.

44 *De natura hominis*, ed. M. Morani (Leipzig, 1987), and *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, ed. W. Telfer, with English translation (London, 1955), pp. 201–466. John of Damascus, too, appears particularly sensitive to the issue of *αὐτεξούσιον*, providence,



Islamic thought on the subject.<sup>45</sup> It is not coincidental that the unorthodox Muslim thinkers (who, challenged by its ethical implications and consequences, deviated from the mainstream predestinarian Islam) used the same word, *qadār* (power), to speak about human power instead of “freedom of will”; it is for this idiosyncratic and “heretical” notion that they were called *Qadarites*. Essentially the Basra born Abū 'l-Hasan 'Ali al-Ash'arī (ca. 873–935, or 883–941) master theologian (the “John of Damascus” of Islam) and Sunni theology, in his effort to reconcile the extreme position of the ultra-orthodox Jabrites<sup>46</sup> with the Qadarite theology on the issue, produced the mysterious and intricate conception of man's acquisition of God's initial act (*kasb* and *iktisab*)! One can safely say that John of Damascus' references to God's foreknowledge, divine providence, and to human *ἀυτεξούσιον* are actually refutations of heretical, Islamic and Manichaeic, positions on these issues.<sup>47</sup> Thus, John of Damascus discerned clearly, and with a remarkable theological insightfulness, the affinity of Islam with heresies some of them of Christian origin, more than any one of his contemporaries. In fact, for him and for his pupil in spirit Abū Qurra, Islam is purported to be a synthesis of Manichaeism and Nestorianism, or even more perceptively Arianism, posing two crucial challenges against Orthodox Christianity: on the divinity and finality of Jesus by claiming Muhammad as a prophet; and on human *ἀυτεξούσιον* by its overpowering emphasis on God's absolute will! One may say that John of Damascus responded to the first challenge by writing the chapter CI of the *De Haeresibus*, and to the second with the composition of the *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani*.<sup>48</sup>

Chapter CI is a general, short, concise, accurate, and articulate description of Islam, in the manner of his other “systematic” works, the first systematic exposition of Islam made at a most crucial junction of history. It is informative, at a time when Islam as a whole was unknown and inarticulate even by

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predestination, or “freedom of will”, which he discusses extensively. Cf. a) in the *De Fide Orthodoxa* chs. 12–29, 36–44 and 92–94, and indirect references in chs. 14, 17, 18, 26, 58 and 62; b) in the Disputations with a Saracene, PG 94:1586–97 and 96:1336–48; and c) in *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, xv, 131–33, almost identical to the reference in the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, chs. 22–27.

45 A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed. Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London, 1965), pp. 145 ff.

46 From the w. *jabr*, which means imposition of God's will upon humans.

47 Cf. also Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas*, p. 145. Abjurations against Manichaeism are found in *mss* alongside with those against Judaism and Islam, something which shows their relationship and the common theological and moral challenge for Byzantine Christianity. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 518.

48 Cf. PG 94: 1589–93, 96:1336–41; and Abū Qurra “*De autore boni et mali*”, PG 97: 1586–92. Of the three treatises the one in PG 96 is the most complete.

an average Muslim. It is simple and comprehensible to a Christian for whom it was written. It is written from the perspective of Christianity and in aid against proselytism. In reverse, it can also serve a Muslim intellectual to construct an apologetic tool against Christianity, as it can provide a blue print for a fuller systematic exposition of Islam from the Islamic perspective. Modern text introductory books on Islam do not differ significantly, in structure and method, from this earliest Damascene introduction! Has it been used in this way? An answer to this question might be a life-long project. What has been picked up by subsequent Christian polemicists, and capitalized upon, are the tempting references to the perceived as licentious life of Muhammad, the episode of his taking Zayd's wife, the hedonistically misunderstood paradise,<sup>49</sup> and the equally misunderstood Islamic polygamy – elements which occupy only a small part in the Damascene description of Islam; and this is, precisely, what distinguishes John of Damascus from other anti-Islamic polemicists. As unique, insightful, and characteristic features of this treatise can be listed the following: a) the discernment of an Arian rather than Nestorian relationship of Islam to Christianity<sup>50</sup> – a seemingly minor but crucial difference which essentially relates the Christian controversies over the person of Christ with the Muslim controversies over the nature of the Qur'ān as the “Word of God”;<sup>51</sup> b) the perceptive and playful contrast between the notions “Associators” (*Ἐταιριασταί, Mushriqūn*) applied to Christians by Muslims, and *Κόπται* (Mutilators) applied to Muslims by Christians (first by John of Damascus himself); c) the interesting and perceptive reading and interpretation of the name Saracenes (*Σαρακηνοί*) as Sarracenes (*Σαράρακηνοί*) with all the historical, cultural, and polemic consequences of this spelling; d) the deciphering of the words *Khobar*, or *Koubar* as the liturgical invocation “*Allahu akbar*” and its connection to the shrine of the Ka'ba (*Χαβαθά*) and the pre-Islamic cult of Aphrodite;<sup>52</sup> and e) the earliest reference to some surahs by their actual headings – an evidence of historical importance as it points to the early literary structure of the Qu'rān and, perhaps, to surahs which were most frequently recited at the time, or of particular interest to John of Damascus himself.

49 On this and related subjects, see Cf. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

50 Cf. “... Ἀρειανῶ προσομιλήσας μοναχῶ ...” (emphasis is ours), and Sahas, “John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited”, 108–9, #3.

51 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “The Christological Morphology of the Doctrine of the Qur'ān”. Ed. M. Darrol Bryant, *Pluralism, Tolerance and Dialogue: Six Studies*, (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1989), pp. 77–98, (see Chapter 3 in this volume).

52 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 106.

John of Damascus' influence on matters related to Islam in the Byzantine literature has been lengthy, and definitive. The 12–13th century *Formula of Abjuration* attributed to Nicetas Choniates (ca. 1155–ca. 1215/6)<sup>53</sup> is a paraphrase of the Damascene's writings on Islam.<sup>54</sup> From the perspective of the History of Religions, John of Damascus' treatment of Islam leads one to a view of Islam as an offshoot of dynamic monarchianism which arose in the context of theological and ideological conflicts between pagan "polytheism" and Judeo-Christian "monotheism", or between Neoplatonic and Persian philosophical trends and nomadic theistic (Abrahamic) tendencies. At a time of reverence of saints, relics, icons, ascetic pursuit of life, hesychastic ideals, and superlative spiritual goals (like *theosis*), all of which gave the impression to the uninitiated simple nomadic mind of a rampant polytheism and "association" with the creator, Islam, Iconoclasm and similar uprisings must be seen as protest movements – with all the characteristics of a massive and uncompromising protest.<sup>55</sup> With his style and method John of Damascus "taught" his contemporaries, Christians and Muslims alike, how to study and present a "heresy". The material he offers is original, fresh, relevant and with first-hand information. This kind of treatment is unknown to the Byzantines beyond the Syrian/Palestinian region; thence the absence of any systematic treatise on Islam by Constantinopolitan writers with the exception, perhaps, of Nicetas of Byzantium (842–912). The Damascene's treatment of Islam was not a manual for dialogue, in the modern-day sense; it was for the defence of the Christian tradition, for the sake of the Christian community under siege, and for reawakening the Christian community at large.

John of Damascus was challenged, not intimidated, by Islam – or by any trend, policy, or "heresy" for that matter. The oxymoron of his service in the Umayyad court, the domain of "the barbarian-born and slaughter-loving dog of Ishmael"<sup>56</sup> for a significant period of his life and on a major post (or posts), could be seen as a scandal, if not as an act of treason. And yet with an equal determination and sense of personal freedom we see him withdrawing to the

53 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, "Ritual Conversion from Islam to the Byzantine Church", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 36 (1991) 57–69, where further bibliography; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 517–9, (see Chapter 24 in this volume)

54 Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 518. Thus anathema # 11 (PG 140:129C) is equivalent to CI, 6 (PG 94:765A–B). Also in Correspondence of Leo III (717–41) and 'Umar II (717–20), compare the Leo-'Umar, Letter (Armenian) 323–6, 328–9 to CI, 64–66 (PG 94:769A–772D). Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 499, and n. 156.

55 For the relationship between Islam and Iconoclasm, as well as anthropomorphism and Mu'tazila, see Robert M. Haddad, "Iconoclast and Mu'tazila: The Politics of Anthropomorphism", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), pp. 287–305.

56 *Homily on the Annunciation*, PG 96:657B.

Mar Sabba monastery (ca. 724) in order to fight both, Iconoclasm and Islam, from a different vantage point and with different and long lasting means. His withdrawal to the monastery constituted not an act of contrition for any seemingly political or ecclesiastical transgression committed on his part, but rather a conscientious manoeuvre for regrouping and assisting the Christian community to defend itself and survive under a new rule and circumstances. We notice this sentiment gleaming dramatically through the *vita Atheniensis*, which makes John (this former ... Muslim!) traveling from Syria and Egypt to Persia, as another Nicon *ho Metanoieite* (ca. 930–ca. 1000),<sup>57</sup> converting people from heresy to Orthodoxy, and dying as a martyr!<sup>58</sup> Imaginary and legendary these assertions though may be, they reflect the impression of a context in which John of Damascus' whole life and literary production developed.<sup>59</sup>

His life and literary activity reflect an alive and energetic personality, characterized by an existential theological acumen, driven by a sense of pastoral and moral responsibility, and inspired by a trans-historical Christian worldview. They reveal also a personality moulded in an activist political consciousness derived from the rise of Iconoclasm on the one hand and of Islam on the other. The ramifications of his political philosophy are direct and tangible. Consider the Damascene's challenge of the Emperor Leo's involvement through his iconoclastic edict in matters of the ecclesiastical and dogmatic domain, something previously held as an imperial imperative: "It is not of the kings to legislate on matters of the Church", protests John of Damascus; "a duty of the kings is the orderly functioning of political life"; "I do not accept a king who seizes in a tyrannical manner what is the prerogative of priests [i.e. of those ordained in the Church]", declares John of Damascus in a most authoritative and personal way!<sup>60</sup> Alexander Kazhdan,<sup>61</sup> and before him John Meyendorff, have noticed that his religious poetry and hymnography reflect his involvement with and influence by political events and ideological disputes of his times. In his hymns we find petitions for "the victory of the emperor over his enemies", that through the intercession of the

57 The Arab raids and conquest of Crete must have impressed deeply the author of this *vita* to have described Cosma's capture and survival so vividly and now to have invented the evangelization of Christians converted to Islam.

58 Cf. 610–21. According to this *vita* John died as a martyr defending the veneration of icons during the reign of the emperor [Constantine] Copronymous; an assertion found only in *vitae* type C.

59 630–51.

60 "οὐ βασιλέων ἐστὶ νομοθετεῖν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ... βασιλέων ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτικὴ εὐπραξία· ἡ δὲ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κατάστασις, ποιμένων καὶ διδασκάλων", *PG* 94:1296. "οὐ δεχομαι βασιλέα τυραννικῶς τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἀρπάζοντα", *PG* 94:1301.

61 "Kosmas of Jerusalem: 2. Can We Speak of His Political Views?", *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), pp. 329–346. Hoyland, *Seeing*, p. 108, n. 187.

Theotokos the emperor may “trample under his feet the barbarian nations”, that “the cross-bearing sovereign” will protect Christ’s inheritance from the “blasphemous enemies”, and even more concretely and closer to our subject, the assurance that the Theotokos will put under the feet of the Christian emperor “the Ishmaelite people fighting against us”.<sup>62</sup> Although similar petitions and exclamations are abundant in the Byzantine hymnographical and hagiological literature, in the case of John of Damascus such expressions have a particular meaning given the circumstances in which they were expressed.

John of Damascus’ life, writings and the kind of things he did in his life show the legacy which a Father of the Church left to the Christians of the East in particular and of the world in general; a legacy of hope, and dignity, in terms of their spiritual identity. I would dare to say that a similar legacy did he leave to his compatriot Muslims as well, oxymoron though this might sound. We will mention later the impact he made upon the Muslim community and on its intellectual tradition. He did not call for a crusade against them – especially when he had all the opportunities to do so from within. This is exactly what his co-religionists from Constantinople would have liked him to do. Not having done so they accused him to the caliph for ... conspiracy! The well-known story of the amputation of his hand as a punishment and his miraculous healing<sup>63</sup> may have their origin in the Arabic tradition of miracles of the Theotokos,<sup>64</sup> or they may be used as reasons to explain his transition from the Umayyad court to Mar Sabba; but they also stand as evidence of the stark difference between him and the ruling Byzantine class in political, theological, and cultural mentality. After his miraculous healing the caliph repented for the cruel punishment he had inflicted upon him, and he begged him to remain in the court and continue practicing his duties for him; not so the Orthodox Byzantine authorities! To them John of Damascus remained a “conspirator against the empire” (“*ἐπίβουλος τῆς βασιλείας*”).

John of Damascus was not a fundamentalist, or a fanatic, with the single goal in mind the suppression or eradication of Islam violently. He exposed the essence of Islam, and he left it on the Christians to reject it or not from their own perspective. He did not demonize Islam for anything wrong that was happening within the Christian community and the empire at the time. There is no indication that he ever made Iconoclasm, with all its theological aberration, its political violence, and the social disorder which it caused, responsible for

62 For references to such quotations, see Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views on Islam”, pp. 117–8. Hoyland, *Seeing*, p. 108, n.188.

63 Cf. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ανάλεκτα*, IV, 318–327; *PG* 94:449–461; and Constantine Acropolites, “*Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὸν Ἁγίον Ἰωάννην τὸν Δαμασκηνόν*”, *PG* 140:836–853.

64 Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas*, p. 71.

the rise of Islam; or the other way around. Without caricaturing it, he brought Islam face to face with his own religious tradition, as it is the right of any religious person to do, and allowed a more sober juxtaposition to emerge between the two. John of Damascus has been criticized as having dealt with Islam in terms of what Islam is *not* (that is to say, a *non-Christian* religion) rather than on its own ground and identity in terms of what Islam *is* – a perceived weakness and bias in the mind of modern Historians of Religions. Yet, in actuality, he defined and juxtaposed the criterion of the Christian identity, which is the event and the phenomenon of Christ as the incarnate Logos, while concentrating on the equivalent phenomenon and event in Islam which is the Qurʾān rather than Muhammad himself! No wonder that he dealt with the Qurʾānic Jesus<sup>65</sup> and the Qurʾān itself,<sup>66</sup> more than with any other topic.

A final point that needs to be mentioned briefly here, documentation of which would require a lengthy study, is the debt that Islam owes to John of Damascus as a theologian, thinker, and writer, in the development of three topics and areas as a formulated tradition. First, in the area of systematic presentation of its doctrine, one notices a striking similarity between the structure of the *Fount of Knowledge* and the equivalent *al-Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn* (*On the Islamic Faith*) by al-Ashʿarī, just one and a half century later. One cannot bypass the exact structure and division of both works in “Philosophical Chapters”, “On the Heresies”, and “On the Orthodox Faith” as merely coincidental.<sup>67</sup> Second, in the area of doctrine as such and especially in John of Damascus’ extensive discussion of the attributes of God,<sup>68</sup> one may discover the impetus which led the Muslims to search into the Qurʾān for the “99 most beautiful names of God”, a list of divine epithets which with the help of a 33-bead rosary developed into a spiritual devotional exercise of the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God. Chapter fourteen of the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, and not only this, lists epithets and attributes of God most of which (if not all) can be repeated with no hesitation by a Muslim as well. Third, in John of Damascus’ intense discussion of the *ἀντεξόσιον* and in the consistent use of the word for

65 Cf. Sahas, “John of Damascus ... Revisited” in *passim*.

66 This particular point has been challenged by John Merrill who postulates with some exaggeration that “No other conclusion seems possible but that our author [John of Damascus] was not acquainted with even these four suras of the Qurʾān in detail”. “Of the Tractate of John of Damascus on Islam” (I have seen only the internet version of this article).

67 Cf. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 87.

68 The whole first book of the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, in fourteen chapters, is dealing with the existence, knowledge, and attributes of the one triune God! Chapters 14, 9, 11 and 12, but by far not the only ones, deal specifically with God’s attributes. God’s mystery and knowledge are topics discussed throughout this and other works of his.

the question of human freedom and moral responsibility, one can discern the impact which this theological position and term made upon the unorthodox politico-sectarian movement of the Qadarites and to the history of Islamic theology. It is interesting to note that the chief Qadarite theologian Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), contemporary to John of Damascus, was also an ascetic figure!<sup>69</sup> From the Qadarites the notion passed onto the Mu'tazilite theology, via Wāsil b. 'Atā (d. 749) and 'Amr b. 'Ubayd (d. 762).<sup>70</sup> On some issues as the one on divine providence and the human *αὐτεξούσιον* (or "free will"), although a topic of an early debate in the Christian community as we mentioned earlier, it is often difficult to say with certainty whether it was John of Damascus who has made a particular impact on Islam, or vice versa. It is worth repeating here the words of Andrew Louth, that "the doctrine of providence is a principal concern in John Damascene's *Dialogue against the Manichees*, which itself may be seen as reflecting the intellectual climate of early Islam, on which John seems to have been thoroughly aware".<sup>71</sup> It is worth pondering on and investigating in depth the question of how much the Muslim life and doctrine challenged John of Damascus to rehearse, elaborate on, reshape, and restate in a particular way the Orthodox position on various doctrinal and moral issues – a most difficult, but not irrelevant question to raise!

More often than not friends are at odds in finding appropriate words to praise their heroes; not so with foes. When it comes to insults foes become passionate, imaginative, and unreserved, and if reversed, their insults reveal true qualities of a person. Behind an insult there seems to be a glimmering of truth in disguise. This might be the case of John of Damascus with his iconoclast foes of the council of Hieria (754). They anathematized him as "one with an ill sounding name" (*κακώνυμον*) unable to understand his prominent and good family name *Mansur* (= victorious)! They branded as "Saracene-minded"

69 Much could be said about the confluence of ideals between Syro-Palestinian monasticism and the rise of the Sufi movement. John of Damascus experienced personally the voluptuous and pompous life in the caliphal court, something which ran contrary to popular sentiment of rule, to the essence of Islam, and its ideal of humility. Those Muslims who during the Umayyad caliphate were dissatisfied with this kind of imperial behaviour and administration, in protest they imposed upon themselves poverty (called for this *fūqarā'* = poor) and became the pioneers of what developed to become the spiritual expression of Islam, known as Sufism. It is interesting that John of Damascus, too, did not leave the Umayyad court for the city but for the strict monastic environment of Mar Sabba in the Judean desert! Cf. also above, n. 42.

70 Cf. Sahas, "The Arab character", pp. 195 f., and 201. A comparative study of John of Damascus' life and work with these three figures might reveal interesting affinities among them.

71 Louth, *St. John Damascene*, p. 82.

(σαρβρακηνόφρων) him who was proven to be a most perceptive and effective refuter of Islam. The accusation was a loaded and dangerous one, as collusion and any kind of relation with the Arabs constituted a treasonous offense and a worst accusation that could be ascribed to a person, especially during the early centuries of the Arab conquests. They called “iconolater”, or worshiper of idols (εἰκονολάτρην) him who was the most prominent theologian of the icons and the defender of their veneration. They called “writer of falsehood”, or “of errors” (φαλσογράφον) him who was a proven, and most accurate and discerning scholar. They called “insulter of Christ” (ὕβριστήν Χριστοῦ) him who was one of the most competent and colourful Church hymnographers of Christ, of Theotokos, and of saints. They called “offender of the royal authority” (ἐπίβουλον τῆς βασιλείας) him who was a most faithful and ardent defender of Orthodox Byzantium. They called “teacher of impiety” (ἀσεβείας διδάσκαλον) him who was the greatest theologian, East and West, in his times and after. They called “falsifier of the holy scriptures” (παρερμηνευτήν τῆς θείας γραφῆς) him who with his writings, his hymns and his defence of the icons made theology and the Christian scriptures a property for the literate and the illiterate alike ...

May I suggest then that at the exact dawning of Islam (and not in spite of it) John of Damascus emerges as a true *Father* of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church – and a sober, discerning, courageous, caring, saintly, enlightened (and still enlightening) Father at that!



## Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad Period: The “Circle” of John of Damascus

Historians speak of considerable Byzantine influence on the Arabs, especially under the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833), in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, medicine, alchemy and the arts.<sup>1</sup> Little, and historically inconsistently with this experience, do they say about the subtle but formative interaction between the Syro-Palestinian Byzantine life and culture on the one hand and the Umayyad caliphate (661–750) on the other; interestingly enough, this is the period which overlaps with the so-called “Dark Ages” of Byzantium (mid-seventh to early or mid-ninth century)! For some strange and fallacious reason, or lack of it, once the Syro-Palestinian region succumbed to the Arab conquests, early historians and modern byzantinists ceased to deal with the people of these former eastern provinces as heirs of Byzantium and ignored the phenomenon of the Syro-Palestinian Hellenism and its impact upon its peoples, Christians and Muslims, during the Umayyad caliphate.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the life, character and activities of personalities such as the Damascene born Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638);<sup>3</sup> Maximus the Confessor (580–662);<sup>4</sup> Anastasius Sinaites (ca. 640–ca. 700);<sup>5</sup> Andreas of Crete

1 Cf. below, n. 38.

2 For an overview of the seventh century, see J.F. Halton, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The transformation of a culture* (Cambridge, 1990); *idem*, “Some considerations on Byzantine society and economy in the seventh century”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985), pp. 75–112. A.N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the seventh century*, 5 vol. (Amsterdam, 1968–1980); and the article “Byzantium, History of ‘Dark Ages’”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York, 1991), pp. 350–52.

3 On Sophronius, see Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique* (Paris, 1972).

4 born, according to a Syriac biography, not in Constantinople but at the village of Hefsin east of the lake of Tiberias; *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 1323.

5 Stergios Sakkos, *Περὶ Ἀναστασίου Σιναιτῶν* (Thessaloniki, 1964). Sidney H. Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987), pp. 341–58; Daniel J. Sahas, “Anastasios of Sinai (c. 640–c. 700) and ‘Anastasii Sinaitae’ on Islam”, in A. Harrak ed., *Contacts between Cultures. West Asia and North Africa* [Volume I of Selected papers from the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies (1990)], Lewiston, 1992), pp. 332–338 (see Chapter 11 in this volume).

(ca. 660–740);<sup>6</sup> Peter of Maiumā (d. 743); Cosmas of Maiumā (ca. 674–ca. 751);<sup>7</sup> and especially the towering figure of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749) as well as the continuator of his tradition Theodore Abū Qurra (ca. 750–ca. 820), as a *collective phenomenon*, have generally been overlooked.<sup>8</sup> However, an examination of the region and the era under the light of these personalities will show that the seventh and eighth centuries may not be so “dark” as other and not essentially, congenially and characteristically Byzantine considerations make them to be.

The lives and writings of these men have been treated separately as ordinary, in isolation from the new environment and world order which the Arab conquests brought about and with little acknowledgement of their affinity with the broader reality of the Byzantine culture. The implied rationale for this silence might be the perception that once the eastern provinces fell to the Arabs, Byzantine culture and civilization ceased to exist or, worse, became “corrupt.”<sup>9</sup> However, for the Arab Christians of the Syro-Palestinian region the sense of corruption of the Byzantine ethos and culture because of the Arab conquests not only was not existent; it did not enter their mind. On the contrary, it seems that the Arab conquests galvanized and intensified their interest in their Syriac Byzantino-Hellenistic identity and culture which they set themselves to preserve as their *modus vivendi et operandi*.<sup>10</sup>

6 Called “Hierosolymites” although he was born in Damascus. On Andreas of Crete, see S. Eustratiades, “Ἀνδρέας ὁ Κρήτης ὁ Ἱεροσολυμίτης”, *Nea Sion* 29 (1934), pp. 673–88.

7 On Cosmas the Melodist, see Theocharis E. Detorakis, *Κοσμάς ὁ Μελωδός. Βίος καὶ ἔργο* (Thessaloniki, 1979). In this context one is tempted to mention here another great Syrian poet, Romanos the Melodist (d. after 555), only because Karl Krumbacher made for a moment an attempt to re-date him from the sixth to the eighth century. Cf. K. Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης ἕως τὴν Εἰκονομαχία* (Athens, 1986), p. 391.

8 The birthplace and his alleged “Correspondence” with Umar II make even the iconoclast Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717–741) congenial to the “circle” which we are about to describe; although the finesse and sophistication of argument cast doubts on this correspondence as this emperor’s writing. Cf. Arthur Jeffery, “Ghevond’s text of the correspondence between Omar II and Leo III”, *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), pp. 269–332.

9 Chronographers in general, writing for the sake of history but also for the sake of faith and instruction, tend to drop from their narrative persons, events or eras which they consider corrupted. Cf., for example, Dionysius of Tel-Mahr’s silence over the Chalcedonian bishops of Rome and Constantinople who, according to him, had become corrupt through heresy. Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), p. 86. Back in biblical times the authors of the book of Kings dropped abruptly the name of Solomon as soon as they stated of him that he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines who had “turned away his heart”. 1 Kings, 11:3.

10 On the broader question of continuity/discontinuity of Byzantium, see Alexander Kazhdan and Anthony Cutler, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Byzantine History”,

Several accounts, admittedly mostly hagiological and of a later date, as well as the broader historical evidence, examined as a whole, paint consistently a considerably different picture of the times, the environment and their central figures. These accounts betray no sense of interruption, abating or darkening of the Byzantine intellectual and spiritual tradition. On the contrary, they describe their heroes as consciously and intentionally as hellenistically educated, sophisticated, philosophically oriented, intellectually and monastically inclined, and reform-minded persons; and it is this picture that we are attempting to reconstruct in this study.<sup>11</sup> Although *vitae* of saints have been looked upon with suspicion,<sup>12</sup> their appreciation is growing and their value as historical sources has been recognized and utilized by others;<sup>13</sup> for this particular study they have been proven indispensable.

In studying cultural interactions during the Umayyad period, which is also the formative period of Islam, one cannot ignore the intellectual and spiritual background and the fabric of Damascus, the capital of the caliphate itself at the time. Sophronius expounds with pride on the history of Damascus, the capital of Coele-Syria, his birthplace and the birthplace of Nicholas the

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*Byzantion* 52 (1982), pp. 429–78; Robert Browning, “The Continuity of Hellenism in the Byzantine World: Appearance or Reality?”, in Tom Winnifrith & Penelope Murray eds., *Greece Old and New* (London, 1983), pp. 111–28; and Warren Treadgold, “The Break in Byzantium and the Gap in Byzantine Studies”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990), pp. 289–316 where the broader debate is revisited and annotated.

- 11 This paper takes a look into the evidence provided by *Greek* sources, but it also borrows heavily from, and acknowledges with gratitude, the contribution that others have made to the general theme of Syro-Palestinian relations with Islam during the Umayyad and the early Abbasid period from the Syriac sources; especially Sidney Griffith, “The Monks of Palestine and the growth of Christian literature in Arabic”, *The Muslim World*, 78 (1988) 1–28, and all his other studies included in his collected works, *Arabic Christianity and the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1992); as well as S.P. Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam”, in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982), pp. 9–21, as well as his collected works *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1992).
- 12 Friedrich Lotter, “Methodisches zur Gewinnung historischer Erkenntnisse aus hagiographischer Quellen”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 229 (1979), pp. 298–356.
- 13 E. Gamillscheg, “Historische Gegebenheiten im Spiegel hagiographischer Texte”, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 25 (1976), pp. 1–23; H.G. Magoulias, “The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries AD: Sorcery, Relics and Icons”, *Byzantion* 37 (1967), pp. 228–269. *Idem*, “The lives of the Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Byzantine Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57 (1964), pp. 126–150; Evelyn Patlagean, “Ancient Byzantine hagiography and social history”, in Stephen Wilson ed., *Saints and their Cults. Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge, 1983); and Wilson’s own “Introduction” in this work, pp. 1–53.

philosopher, the mentor of Herod and teacher of Antonius and Cleopatra's children.<sup>14</sup> Damascus, with the help of his pious Greek-speaking parents, Plynthas and Myro, provided Sophronius and his brother with a broad classical education and a Christian upbringing; a unique blend of Greek culture and oriental Christianity, not unusual for the times.<sup>15</sup> The reputation of Damascus as a Christian centre of learning survived long after its Arab conquest. John Mercouropoulos, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1156–66) author of a *vita* of Cosmas of Maiumā and of John of Damascus, describes Damascus as an exalted city enlightened by the light of Christianity and beautified by its saints.<sup>16</sup> The biographer of a tenth-century *vita* of Andreas of Crete referring to Andrea's parents writes about Damascus of *ca.* 660 AD:

Δαμασκός δὲ πόλις αὐτοῖς, οὐδὲν δυτικὸν ὡς ἐξ ἐχθρῶν ἀπίστων εισάγουσα, ἀλλὰ μία τῆς Ἀνατολῆς τυγχάνουσα, πρὸς ἀνατολὴν πίστεως αὐτοῖς ὀρθοδόξου μηδὲν κατασκιάσασα.<sup>17</sup>

The Christian consciousness retained Damascus to be an actively Greek and Christian city, in spite of or along with Islam! The same held true for Jerusalem. After all the records of the Umayyad caliphate itself were all in Greek and, according to Ibn al-Nadīm, they were not translated into Arabic before the reign of Hishām (724–43), 'Abd al-Malik's son.<sup>18</sup> Damascus and Jerusalem together were forming a spiritual axis. Many of those born in Damascus were

14 PG 87.3: 3621B–D.

15 Schönborn, *Sophrone*, p. 54. Sophronius' biographers praise his intelligence and scholarship and, not without some exaggeration, state that "he learned every Greek and Christian writing", "delving in an extraordinary way into all fields of learning" ("ὑπερφυῶς ἐπιστημῶν πασῶν τὸ κράτος ἀνεδύσατο", especially philosophy and rhetoric. Cf. March 11, in *Prophylaeum at Acta Sanctorum, Novembris* (Bruxellis, 1902), p. 527. For this he earned the title "the Sophist", i.e. professor of rhetoric. Sophronius equally excelled as a poet. His *Anacreontica* and *Triodion* are found in PG 87.3: 3733–3838 and 3840–3981. On Sophronius hymns and sermons, see Sophronios Eustratiades, "Σωφρόνιος Πατριάρχης Ἱεροσολύμων", *Nea Sion* 29(1934), pp. 188–93; 241–54; 305–21; 434–42; 481–501. The history of the school of Damascus and its contribution to the survival of the Christian community on the eve of the Muslim invasions is still an unexplored subject.

16 "Τούτοις οὖν εἰ καὶ Δαμασκός ἐπιγγάνυται, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἦττον, ὥσπερ τῷ λουτρῷ καὶ τῷ φωτὶ τοῦ κήρυκος πρότερον, οὕτω δὴ καὶ τῷ πατρὶ τῶν νῦν κροτουμένων [John of Damascus and Cosmas] καθωραΐζεται". *Analekta*, IV, p. 305.

17 "Their city, Damascus, did not have anything western as if from unfaithful enemies, but it was a city of the East which concealed nothing from [lit. shaded nothing of] the rising side of the Orthodox faith". *Analekta*, V, 170.

18 *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm. A Tenth-century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. Bayard Dodge (New York, 1970), p. 583.

eventually led into the famous monastery of Mar Sabba and into the orbit of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Jerusalem; that is why the Damascene origin of many personalities, by having been called Ἁγιοπολίται (*Hagiopolitae* that is to say, “citizens of the holy City” [Jerusalem]), they have been confused as having been born in Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup> Thence it is more accurate to speak about “Syro-Palestinian” rather than Syrian culture.

One discovers at work in this city during the Umayyad caliphate an ideological and reform-minded Christian movement (I hesitate to call it a “school”) which for lack of a more accurate term I would call “circle”, exponents of the tradition of the Damascene school of rhetoric, contemporary and centred around the personality of John of Damascus. This “circle” appears to be particularly active during the Umayyad era, putting into action its education and creed under the challenge of Islam and in response, perhaps, to the progressive Arabization and Islamization of the Syro-Palestinian region. In doing so it distinguished itself from Byzantium proper in literary productivity. The calibre of the intellectual and spiritual activity of this Damascene “circle” represents a high, if not the highest, moment of the Syro-Palestinian Christian consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

One is led to call those contemporaries of John of Damascus an intellectual “circle” by Abū Qurra’s own attribution of one of his “Refutations of the Saracens”, written decades after the time of John of Damascus, “ἀπὸ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ”!<sup>21</sup> Born in ca. 750, the year when John of Damascus perhaps died, Abū Qurra, who wrote mostly in Arabic, holds the strongest connection with John of Damascus’ circle, as member of Mar Sabba monastery from where he began and where he ended his life with only a brief interval as bishop of Haran (795–812) and in the Abbasid court in Baghdad! Ignace Dick has

19 E.g. Cosmas of Maiumā and John of Damascus are called *Hagiopolitae* (from the holy City, i.e., Jerusalem). *Analekta*, IV, 273. Like John, Cosmas also was from Damascus, not from Jerusalem, as Detorakis has shown. “Ἀνέκδοτος βίος”, pp. 262–4.

20 In a previous study of ours we dealt with the topic of the *Arab* character of the Christian disputation with Islam, drawing from the person and the evidence of John of Damascus. “The Arab character of the Christian disputation with Islam. The case of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)” In *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden, 1992), pp. 185–205 (see Chapter 21 in this volume). This paper is a continuation of sorts of that study; an attempt to broaden the spectrum and point to a conscientious “circle” composed of a Syro-Palestinian, reform-minded and monastically oriented intelligentsia.

21 PG 96: 1596–1597; tr. in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 156–59.

dealt with him as “un continuateur arabe de St. Jean Damascène”.<sup>22</sup> This “ἀπὸ φωνῆς”, therefore, is neither a casual nor a complimentary expression; it is a formal appellation which appears appended to the name of a professor, or master, of a circle of disciples from the fifth–sixth to the eighth century in the intellectual communities of Athens, Alexandria and Gaza.<sup>23</sup> This designation alerts us then to look for a tradition of intellectual monks in and about Mar Sabba in a close intellectual and spiritual collaboration with each other. One may want to view John of Damascus’ major systematic work, *Fount of Knowledge*, not necessarily as a work of his own *hand*, but as the product of a team of researchers, compilers, organizers, copyists and editors under the Damascene’s personal guidance. The massive work of his, synthetic and anthological in nature, such as the accumulation of philosophical terminology and schools in the *Capita Philosophica*, the compilation of heresies in the *De Haeresibus* which is actually an updated version of the recapitulations of Epiphanius’ *Panarion*, as well as the anthological content especially of the third of his *Orationes pro sanctis imaginibus*,<sup>24</sup> may point to a “school” at work; while the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, other more cohesive, dogmatic, hagiological works and hymns might be closer to his own hand!<sup>25</sup> Given the structure of this Sabbaitic “institution”, one may not find it coincidental that a few decades later the Abbasid caliph al-Mamūn (813–833) established not a University but actually a *Bayt al-hikma*, which in fact was a house of accumulation and translation of classical works. If the Arab Muslim occupation ushered a new world order and this for John of Damascus and his likely-minded contemporaries meant to take stock of what was available and needed to be preserved within a shrinking Christian community, the same world order for the Abbasids meant to collect what would be useful and profitable for their expanding Muslim community.

22 “Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Haran. La person et son milieu”, *Proche Orient Chrétien* 12 (1962), pp. 209–23; 319–32; 13 (1963) 114–29.

23 Marcel Richard, “Ἀπὸ φωνῆς”, *Byzantion*, 20 (1950) 191–222, at 192 and 222.

24 Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vols. I (Berlin, 1969); IV (Berlin, 1981), pp. 19–67; III (Berlin, 1975), pp. 144–200. Paul Lemerle has commented on the significance for the future Byzantine culture of the *florilegia* as means of transmitting knowledge through ancient texts. *Le premier humanisme byzantin. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1971), p. 44. English translation by Helen Lindsay and Ann Moffatt, *Byzantine Humanism. The First Phase. Notes and remarks on education and culture in Byzantium from its origins to the 10th century* (Canberra, 1986).

25 Even the *De Fide Orthodoxa* seems to have undergone revisions made either by the author himself or by someone else of his “circle”. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 53, n.2; ed. Kotter, *Die Schriften* II (Berlin, 1973).

After Justinian closed the public institutions of learning<sup>26</sup> for aspiring to paganism,<sup>27</sup> education, elementary and secondary, became private, and in the case especially of elementary education this was offered in monasteries.<sup>28</sup> It is in this sense that individual teachers transmitted their knowledge to their students using particular books as textbooks, particular disciplines with particular methodologies, that we can speak of “circles”. Education became selective, possibly elitistic, and private. Various *Vitae* present John of Damascus’ father actively seeking a private teacher for his son with specific qualifications and expertise, particularly in Greek.<sup>29</sup> Revival of classical Greek in Syria is also alluded to by all other *vitae* of contemporary Syro-Palestinian personalities. A *vita* of Cosmas of Maiumā, adopted brother of John of Damascus, dated probably from the eleventh century, makes the father of John of Damascus unable to speak Greek. Mansūr was in need of a translator (*δι’ ἑρμηνέως*) in order to communicate with the future tutor of his sons, Cosmas the captive Sicilian, who had been brought by Arab pirates from Crete to Damascus.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Sophronius the later Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638), had been educated in the school of Damascus; and so probably had Andreas of Crete who was also from Damascus. The other two Damascenes, John and his adopted brother Cosmas, were privately educated. All four of them excelled as theologians and

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- 26 The Platonic School of Athens was closed in 529. The Aristotelian School of Alexandria survived with John Philoponos. For the closure of classical schools, see Alan Cameron, “The end of the ancient Universities”, *Cahiers d’Histoire mondiale* 10 (1967), pp. 653–73.
- 27 Aik. Christophilopoulou has suggested that one should interpret Justinian’s closing of the school not as a blow against the pagan religion in the name of Christianity, but under the light of Justinian’s ideal to reconnect the empire with the Roman past which implied for him the curtailment of the expansion of the Greek spiritual tradition; a rather long-winded hypothesis. *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία*, I, 324–610, (Athens, 1975), pp. 272–3.
- 28 P.A. Yannopoulos, *La société profane dans l’empire byzantin des VII<sup>e</sup>, VIII<sup>e</sup> et IX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Louvain, 1975), pp. 169–70, and n. 288.
- 29 Constantine Acropolites in an encomium to John of Damascus praises him as a fast learner of Greek (PG 140:829); an indication that, perhaps, he was not Greek speaking originally! This may explain further such negative expressions about him as “Σαρακηνόφρων” made by the iconoclastic Council of Nicea in 754 (Mansi, *sc*, XIII, 356D), or other comments that he and his adopted brother Cosmas rose from a wicked root (“ἐκ φαύλης ρίζης ἐβλάστησαν”), and that his father Mansur was pagan (“τοῦ ἔθνους τυγχάνοντι”) or an impious man (“ἄνηρ δυσσεβῆς”) found in a *vita* of his adopted brother Cosmas of Maiumā; ed. Theocharis Detorakis, “Ἀνέκδοτος βίος Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Μαΐουμᾶ”, *Epeteris Etaireias Byzantinon Spoudon* 41 (1974), pp. 259–96, at 278–9.
- 30 “Ὁ δὲ παραλαβὼν καὶ τῶν δεσμῶν ἀπολύσας διηρώτα τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν δι’ ἑρμηνέως, οὐ γὰρ τὴν Ἑλλήνων φωνὴν ἐπεπαίδευτο, τὴν Σύρων δὲ μᾶλλον ὡς πάτριον οὖσαν ἐξήσκητο”; emphasis is ours. Théocharis Detorakis, “Vie inédite de Cosmas le Mélode. BHG 394 b”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 99 (1981), pp. 109.

hymnographers, and all four of them, but especially the last three who became monks, were related to the monastery of Mar Sabba.

Monasteries became centres of spirituality and learning, notably that of Mar Sabba. At such centres education was not reserved only for future monks and clergy limited to reading, writing and to copying scriptures. Outside the sphere of Greek and Roman culture in Mesopotamia, such centres became “schools” of a higher grade which gave a grammatical and rhetorical education based on the Syriac scriptures.<sup>31</sup> Tertiary schools may have disappeared by the seventh and eighth centuries, but not education; at least in Syria. Various sources, such as a *vita* of Andreas of Crete from an as early as a tenth-century copy, suggest that encyclical education in language and literature began for these Damascenes at a very early age. This progressed through advanced subjects, such as grammar,<sup>32</sup> and the ones which were of the special expertise of a teacher, not least among them being lives of saints.<sup>33</sup> A *vita* of John of Damascus and Cosmas of Maiumā from a thirteenth-century codex names specifically some of the subjects their teacher taught them, which may be taken as an indication of the curriculum and of the intellectual foundation of the “circle”: Greek language and rhetoric (“τὰ τῆς Δημοσθένους ἐκείνου γλώσσης”),<sup>34</sup> dialectics, numbers i.e. mathematics, music, geometry, astronomy and philosophy; that is to say, a deliberately liberal arts education interwoven with

31 A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602. A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, vol. II (Baltimore, 1986), p. 1007.

32 “ἐκδιδαχθεὶς δεόντως τὰ περὶ γράμματα, ἐν συνέσει πολλῇ διαπρέπων, τοῖς ὑψηλοτέροις ἐπιβαίνει μαθήμασι· γραμματικῆς τὸ κάλλιστον πρὸς σοφωτάτην παιδευσιν ἑαυτῷ συλλέξας”. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias* (St. Petersburg, 1888/Bruxelles, 1963), v, p. 171; subsequently referred to as *Analekta*.

33 Of particular interest to this paper is Yannopoulos’ finding that lives of saints were widely used as textbooks; thence the flourishing of hagiography as a genre of writing. Yannopoulos, *La société*, p. 169. On the general topic of education, see also Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, p. xvii; Averil Cameron, “New themes and styles in Greek literature, seventh–eighth centuries”, in A. Cameron and L. Conrad eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 81–105; and *idem*, “The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century AD Hellenism and the emergence of Islam”, in S. Said, ed., *Ellénismos. Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l’identité grecque* (Strasbourg, 1991), pp. 289–313.

34 *Analekta*, IV, p. 311, 25. The expression must be taken as a reference not to the elementary but to the refined language and to the art of rhetoric.



religious piety.<sup>35</sup> In fact, this was the exact curriculum of higher education in the academies of classical antiquity.<sup>36</sup>

Damascene intellectuals at some time of their lives had been involved in public life and had held important posts in the Umayyad administration.<sup>37</sup> Thus Greek language and culture had penetrated the administration of the caliphate and eventually the fabric of the Arab-Muslim society, before the Abbasid renaissance.<sup>38</sup> The early Muslim conquests did not result in a total break of

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- 35 The author of the *vita*, through the mouth of John of Damascus' father, characterizes his sons' education as liberation from ignorance and barbarism, a reference, perhaps, to the Arab-Muslim environment in which the two were growing. This environment is further characterized as "an unbearable madness of thorns", an arable land which has been filled suddenly by a wicked sewer with darnel ("καὶ ὡσπερανεὶ τις ἐκ συνθήματος τῆς ὤδε πάσης ἀρούρας πονηρὸς σπορεὺς ζιζανίων ἐγένετο". *Analekta*, IV, p. 312), where there are countless corrupters razing the place shamelessly who teach nothing else but wickedness ("εἰσὶ δὲ φθορεῖς οὐ μετρητοὶ τὸν ὤδε τόπον ἀναιδῶς ληϊζόμενοι, καὶ δύσκολον οὕτως ἄλλο μηδέν, ὡς τὸ τὴν μοχθηρίαν ἀπομαθεῖν". *Analekta*, IV, p. 312). Thus Cosmas the Sicilian was to be for his pupils "a rose in the midst of thorns" ("Ρόδον οὖν ἐν μέσῳ ἀκανθῶν ἀξιώ αὐτοὺς ἀποτέλεσον". *Analekta*, IV, pp. 312–13). This *vita* seems to suggest that the education of the Damascenes had a deliberate goal: the cultivation and survival of the Greek culture and of the Christian faith as a counterbalance of the rapid Arabization and Islamization of the city. Cf. *Analekta*, IV, p. 313.
- 36 Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, II, pp. 1002–3. The list of subjects compares to the sciences in which the Arabs also excelled; a pointer to the Syro-Palestinian curriculum which they inherited from this "circle".
- 37 John Meyendorff has suggested that John of Damascus, for example, was nothing more than a tax collector in the Umayyad court and that "such a post would not necessarily imply deep acquaintance with the Arab civilization". "Byzantine views on Islam", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), p. 116. However the Mansūr family had held this post of Byzantine tax collectors for generations prior to the Arab conquests. The service was by no means simple. It involved assessing and collecting taxes, which were in large amounts, as well as keeping records of their disbursement. The Byzantine army was paid in coins collected from these taxes. One of the evidences used to support the "Dark Ages" of Byzantium is the disappearance of monetary economy, which must be connected with the loss of the enormous tax revenues from Syria and Egypt following the Arab conquests. Treadgold, "The Break in Byzantium", p. 310. Even after the conquests most of the taxes levied upon the Christians were now used to support the Arab army and its expeditions. For the various descriptions of John of Damascus's office, see Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 41–45. The importance of his office is attested to also by the legendary amputation and healing of his hand! A *vita* which is almost exclusively devoted to this particular miracle is a testimony to the view that such a severe punishment was meant to match the status of the perpetrator. Theocharis Detorakis, "La main coupée de Jean Damascène. (BHG 885 c)", *Analekta Bollandiana* 104 (1986), pp. 371–81.
- 38 On the transmission of Greek into Arabic, see Michael W. Dols, "Syriac into Arabic: The transmission of Greek Medicine", *ARAM Periodical* 1 (1989), pp. 45–52. For the numerous

Syria and Palestine with its Roman and especially its Hellenistic-Byzantine past; if nothing else, they helped to stimulate the cultural, spiritual and religious self-consciousness of an intellectual elite which became determined to re-focus on it and leave a lasting Byzantine mark upon the Arab culture, which was also its own culture. Syrians and Arabs had much closer links in pre-Islamic times than has been acknowledged.<sup>39</sup> The extensive transmission, therefore, of Greek knowledge and culture to the Muslim Arabs did not take place in a vacuum. Many of the translations had already been made from Greek into Syriac, from which they were now translated into Arabic.<sup>40</sup> For two centuries prior to Islam the Syrians had been translating Greek works into Syriac. Thus, as Lemerle has remarked, Islam retained essentially those parts of Hellenism which the Syrians had known and retained, as Arabic translations were normally made from Syriac and translators themselves were most often Syrians.<sup>41</sup> If the closure of the philosophical schools ushered the “Dark Ages” of Byzantium, that same act became the catalyst for the revival of Greek culture in the Eastern provinces. This revival was further revitalized and intensified after, and possibly because of, the Arab conquests, an event which insulated the eastern provinces from any further incursion of intellectual obscurantism. As Robert Browning has aptly remarked, “It might be argued that the educational patterns of late antiquity survived better in cities under Muslim rule than in those still under Byzantine sovereignty, which were long harassed by

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references to translations from Greek and Syriac into Arabic, see Aldo Mieli, *La science arabe et son rôle dans l'évolution scientifique mondiale* (Leiden, 1966) *in passim*; C.A. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World* (London, 1988), p. 31. Lemerle has devoted chapter 11 of his *Le premier humanisme* to the hypothesis of a Syrian-Arab link; pp. 22–42. See also Lacy O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs* (London, 1951).

39 Cf. Hugh Kennedy, “Change and Continuity in Syria and Palestine at the time of the Moslem Conquest”, *ARAM Periodical* 1 (1989), pp. 258–267. For the state of Syriac culture in the seventh century, see Sebastian P. Brock, “Syriac Culture in the Seventh Century”, *ARAM Periodical* 1 (1989), pp. 268–280. The author examines four areas: historical writings, the study of Aristotle and Greek philosophical writings, spirituality or literature on the interior life, and popular literature both, prose and poetry.

40 On the topic of interaction between Syriac and Arab cultures, see the papers of the “Syriac and Arab culture during the Abbasid Era in Iraq” Conference, Oxford, 23–26 September, 1991 published in *ARAM Periodical* 3 (1991); especially the papers by Sebastian Brock, “The Syriac Background to Hunayn’s Translation Techniques”, pp. 139–162; Gotthard Strohmaier, “Hunain ibn Ishāq – an Arab scholar translating into Syriac”, pp. 163–170; and Samir Khalil Samir, “Un traité perdu de Hunayn ibn Ishāq retrouvé dans la ‘somme’ d’Ibn al’Assāl”, pp. 171–192.

41 *Le premier humanisme*, p. 30, n. 17.

Arab or Slav attacks";<sup>42</sup> and that "in fact the dominant role of Greek culture was strengthened by the conquests of the seventh century".<sup>43</sup>

Along with their Greek, Syrian Christians were proud and mindful of their own Syriac culture.<sup>44</sup> A Syrian named George, contemporary to John of Damascus, was consecrated bishop of the Arab tribes in 724. His diocese included the Tanūkh, Tha'lab and Taghlib. He became well-known for his translation of Aristotle's *Organon* into Syriac. Yūhannā b. Māsawayh (d. 857) also, a Syrian physician, became the head of al-Mamūn's Bayt al-Hikmah! He was charged by Hārūn al-Rashīd to translate Greek books, mainly medical, into Arabic.<sup>45</sup> The Damascene "circle", therefore, did not function within a cultural, linguistic and ideological vacuum, but it operated in a self-conscious and self-assured context.

As far as the political context is concerned, during the Umayyad era two major and interwoven developments were taking place in the Byzantine world, one "internal" and the other "external", iconoclasm (726–813) on the one hand and the Arab expansion on the other. The characterization "internal" and "external" for these events are only conventional and antinomical. The roots and influences on iconoclasm reach far beyond Byzantium and they include even Islam;<sup>46</sup> and the early Umayyad period was one of predominance of Byzantine Greek expertise, language and culture. Gradually from its middle

42 "Literacy in the Byzantine World", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 4 (Essays presented to Sir Steven Runciman)* (Oxford, 1978), 39–54, at 47.

43 "The Continuity of Hellenism", pp. 118–9.

44 As John Mercouropoulos himself testifies, his *vita* of John of Damascus is a translation from an Arabic version: "... ἐφ' οἷς τὸν ἔρανον τοῦτον ἄλλου πεπονηκότος ὡς εἶχεν αὐτὸς εὐρηκῶς ἐγὼ κατὰ δύναμιν ἔγραψα καὶ διαλέκτῳ Ἀράβων ..." *Analekta*, IV, 350, 12–14. Another *vita* of John of Damascus (PG 94:429–489) is also based upon an Arabic original. The fact that we have at least three *vitae* written originally in Arabic shows not only the extent of Arabization of Syria-Palestine from the middle of the Umayyad period, but also the consciousness of the Arab lineage and culture of John of Damascus and of those around him.

45 The Syriac impact on the Arab-Muslim world has been well-known and extensively documented. Cf. R.Y. Ebied, "The Syriac Impact on Arabic Literature" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad Period*, ed., A.F.L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 497–505, at 500.

46 Patricia Crone's thesis in her widely read and controversial article "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm" has been that Byzantine Iconoclasm was a response to the rise of Islam. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980) 59–95. On this long debated topic, see L.W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 10–33; Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, pp. 18–21; G.B. Ladner, "Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy", *Mediaeval Studies*, 2 (1940) 127–149; A.A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, AD 721", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9–10 (1955), pp. 23–47; G. E. von Grunebaum, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the influence of the Islamic environment", *History of Religions* 2 (1962), pp. 1–10; Robert

period one notes a transition from Arab “internationalism” and inclusiveness (perceived or real) represented by the early Umayyad caliphate, to the Arab nationalism and theocratic exclusiveness which began with the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705). This is the period of the Arabization and Islamization of the caliphate which is ascertaining itself, and in Byzantine models,<sup>47</sup> and is challenging the very legitimacy and existence of Byzantium. Two significant manifestations of this challenge must be cited, the siege of Constantinople (717–718) by Maslamah, brother of caliph Yazid II, and the piratic expeditions against the islands of the Aegean, especially Crete. It is in the context of these developments that one needs to consider and evaluate the phenomenon of the Syro-Palestinian intellectual “circle” of John of Damascus; in fact, it was as a result of these latter piratic expeditions that Cosmas the Sicilian is brought to the front stage of this intellectual revival when as prisoner he is transported to Damascus, he is found there and employed by John of Damascus’ father as teacher of his adopted son Cosmas and of his natural son, the celebrated John of Damascus.<sup>48</sup> The life also of Andreas of Crete is interwoven with the misfortunes of Crete and the expeditions of the Hagarenes.<sup>49</sup> The sources do not tell us explicitly of any influence of political or ideological nature which Cosmas the Sicilian may have made on his two prominent disciples, but their silence on this score can hardly be taken as evidence to the contrary. The general tone and the collective picture which these sources paint is that of a Damascene movement of ideologues, strong willed individuals who play a significant role in the cultural, intellectual and spiritual life of the Syro-Palestinian region during the Umayyad caliphate. It is in this historical, cultural, intellectual and spiritual background that one needs to consider the make-up, the characteristics, the ideals, and the operation of the “circle”.

## 1 A “Circle” of Independent Thinkers

The trend of an intellectual “circle” with a high Christian Syrian consciousness may be traced back to Sophronius (560–638) and to Mansūr b. Sargūn, John of Damascus’ father. One needs to recall Sophronius’ steadfast and single position on the question of the two energies in Christ vis-à-vis the monoenergitic position held by the rest of the heads of the pentarchy and emperor

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Haddad, “Iconoclasts and the Mut’azila. The Politics of Anthropomorphism”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), pp. 287–305.

47 Cf. El-Cheikh-Saliba, “Byzantium viewed by the Arabs” (Harvard University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992), pp. 39–41.

48 Detorakis, “Ἀνέκδοτος βίος”, pp. 270, 272.

49 *Analekta*, v, p. 177.

Heraclius himself! He can be also remembered for his strong ecclesiastical and political allegiance to Constantinople as the sole and final defender of the city of Jerusalem against the Arabs and the one who, after waiting in vain for Heraclius' military support, was forced to capitulate the city to 'Umar in order to protect its population and its holy sites from destruction.<sup>50</sup> Various sources present Mansur also as "ἀνὴρ Χριστιανικώτατος",<sup>51</sup> searching eagerly for a Christian humanist teacher for his two sons, taking personal charge of the education of his children to the point of waking them up for morning prayers and getting them ready to go to school!<sup>52</sup> Another *vita* praises Mansūr for the intellectual and spiritual "illumination" of Damascus,<sup>53</sup> a daring person who even under Muslim rule attempted to do the impossible, to establish places of worship in Damascus where "with free mind and tongue sent forth dauntlessly holy hymns to his God and lord".<sup>54</sup> These hagiological sources paint a picture of a conscientious and fervently pre-disposed Hellenistic Christian Damascene community ideologically determined to stand against the adversary forces of the time, either heretical or political, and to defend its heritage.

In the celebrated incident of the alleged "plot" of John of Damascus against the caliph, after the caliph was convinced of his innocence and pleaded with him to remain in his court, Cosmas his adopted brother undertook the defence of his brother. According to the biographer, he reminded the caliph of how unfairly, indeed, cruelly, he had treated John by having his hand amputated, and he pointedly remarked that on another occasion the ruler's anger might bring about the amputation not of a hand but of the head of his advisor! With this sarcastic remark Cosmas concluded: "ὅταν δὲ τὸ ὑπὸ χεῖρα πιέζηται καὶ εἶη τὸ δεσποτικὸν ἰταμῶς ἀπηνέστερον, παρεκκλίνειν οἶμαι δεῖν τὴν μετ' αὐτῶν συμβιώ- τευσιν";<sup>55</sup> a quotable maxim in defence of what we would call today academic freedom, or freedom of speech! The author of the *vita* notes that the caliph was

50 Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia* (ed. de Boor), p. 330; his synodical letter, in PG 87:3: 3147A–3200C; F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 151–2, 322, n. 287; C. Papadopoulos, *Ἱστορία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας Ἱεροσολύμων* (Jerusalem, 1910), pp. 235–271; I. Phokylides, "Ἰωάννης ὁ Μόσχος καὶ Σωφρόνιος ὁ Σοφιστὴς ὁ καὶ Πατριάρχης Ἱεροσολύμων", *Nea Sion*, 13 (1913) 815–36, 14 (1914) 90–97, 185–201.

51 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 559.

52 *Analekta*, IV, p. 313.

53 *Analekta*, IV, p. 305.

54 "τολμᾷ δὲ πράγμα τῷ τότε καιρῷ δυσκολώτατον καὶ πολλοῖς, εἰ φωραθείη, φέρον τὸν κίνδυνον- εὐκτηρίους οἴκους πηξάμενος καὶ τὸν οἶκον ἅπαντα τῷ λουτρῷ καθάρας τοῦ πνεύματος, οὕτως ἔλευθέρα γνώμη καὶ γλώττη τοὺς θεῖους ὕμνους ἀπτόητως τῷ ἑαυτοῦ Θεῷ καὶ δεσπότη ἀνέπε- μπε ... *Analekta*, IV, p. 305.

55 "When that which is produced by the hand [i.e. writing] is suppressed, and recklessly des- potism becomes even harsher, it is time I think for the cohabitation of these two to come to an end". *Analekta*, IV, p. 327.

left speechless and, with that said, the two brothers walked away. On another occasion John of Damascus is presented as an outspoken defender of the Orthodox faith attacking the iconoclast Leo III with those famous maxims:

It is not of the kings to legislate [on matters of] the Church ... The kings' [concern] should be the order of the State. As to the affairs of the Church, these are the responsibility of the pastors and teachers.

I accept no king who seizes tyrannically the priestly office. It is not the kings who received the authority to bind and absolve [sins] ...<sup>56</sup>

Treadgold is right in criticising Sabine MacCormack's generalization that at the time under discussion prophesy, "itself one of the vehicles for protest in the ancient world had officially come to an end" and that protest against the empire, the minister of Christ's dispensations, was considered inappropriate.<sup>57</sup> The hagiographical evidence describing the Damascene scene points clearly to the opposite: to an outspoken "circle" of ideologues, with an intense and conscientious combination of spiritualized Hellenism, monasticized humanism, and contemplative secularism (an impression derived from the lengthy exchanges and dialogues between teacher and pupils, teacher and patron in a thirteenth century *vita* of John of Damascus),<sup>58</sup> challenging theocracy coming from either Arab-Muslim caliphs or from Byzantine-Christian emperors.

## 2 A "Circle" of Hymnographers-Systematic Theologians

The re-establishment of the age of Romanos the Melodist as a late sixth century hymnographer Syrian born in Emessa, who served also as deacon in the church of the Resurrection in Beirut, reinforces the phenomenon of an early and characteristic tradition of Syrian hymnographers.<sup>59</sup> Poetry facilitated memoriza-

56 "Οὐ βασιλέων ἐστὶ νομοθετεῖν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ... Βασιλέων ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτικὴ εὐταξία· ἡ δὲ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κατάστασις ποιμένων καὶ διδασκάλων". "Οὐ δέχομαι βασιλέα τυραννικῶς τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἀρπάζοντα. Οὐ βασιλεῖς ἔλαβον ἐξουσίαν δεσμεῖν καὶ λύειν ..." Kotter, *Die Schriften*, III, 102–3, 113–4.

57 Treadgold, "The Break in Byzantium", p. 296. Sabine MacCormack, "Christ and Empire, Time and Ceremonial in Sixth Century Byzantium and Beyond", *Byzantion* 52 (1982), pp. 285–309, at 297. Peter Brown also has concluded that "political prophesies [and I take this to include political protest as well] by holy men are particularly rife in the literature of the eighth and ninth centuries". "A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy", in his, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 299.

58 *Analekta*, IV, pp. 314–316.

59 On Romanos and his chronology, see Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία*, pp. 357–509.

tion and nomad Arabs cultivated it to preserve their traditions. It was in poetic form that especially the Meccan surahs of the Qur'ān were transmitted and recited. The same quality is found inherently in operation within the Syrian "circle".<sup>60</sup> Sophronius proved to be an attested writer of anacreontics (short-lined lyrical verses) which he used frequently to compose autobiographical notes and hymns.<sup>61</sup> John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiumā, and Andreas of Crete, a third contemporary Damascene, are known as first and foremost eminent hymnographers.<sup>62</sup> Cosmas earned the title "Melodist" (Μελωδός) as one of the most competent hymnographers.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the ones of earlier centuries composed in a simple language, John of Damascus' poems are refined, complex, artistic and with a classical flavour.<sup>64</sup> Andreas of Crete, the composer of hymns to the Theotokos, to John the Baptist and other saints, is considered to be the creator of the *canon*, a new genre of hymn which replaced the *kontakion*, "the one and only great achievement of Byzantine literature", as the *kontakion* has been characterized in this one-sided statement.<sup>65</sup>

For these contemporary hymnographers, hymnography became a tool to bring about a liturgical and theological renewal. In their hands the simple hymn, or *troparion*, was developed into a *kontakion*, a "sort d'homélie catéchétique",<sup>66</sup> and "une form de catéchèse, ce qui explique son fréquent caractère narratif ou dramatique",<sup>67</sup> and the *kontakion* into a *canon*. If the *kontakion* is a brief catechesis, the canon is a kind of *summa theologica* in verses. The well-known Easter canon "Ἀναστάσεως ἡμέρα, λαμπρυνθῶμεν λαοὶ\_ ..." by of John of Damascus, himself the greatest systematic theologian, is a hymnographical adaptation of Gregory of Nazianzus' theological sermon on the

60 Edmond Bouvy has traced examples of poetry even in the Greek translation of John of Damascus' original Arabic *vita*. "Anacréontiques toniques dans la vie de Saint Jean Damascène", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 2 (1893), pp. 110–1.

61 On Sophronius and his lyrics, see references to Eustratiades in note 12 above. Sophronius is the composer of the service of the Sabbath before Good Saturday (Prosabbath) which before had been attributed to Cosmas ("τὸ τότε μέλος τριῶν Σωφρόνιος Ἱεροσολύμων ἐξέθετο", *Analekta*, IV, p. 336, note).

62 Andreas, born in Damascus ca. 660, died in Lesbos, July 4, 740. *Vita* in *Analekta*, v, pp. 169–179. For the hymnographical work of these three Damascenes, see *Βυζαντινὴ Ἰμνογραφία*, in passim.

63 On Cosmas the Melodist's compositions, see *Analekta*, IV, pp. 303–305, and 336–340; J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse a Byzance* (Paris, 1977); Detorakis, *Κοσμάς ὁ Μελωδός*.

64 Panayiotis Trempelas, *Ἐκλογή Ἑλληνικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἰμνογραφίας* (Athens, 1949), p. xxxix.

65 P. Maas – C.A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Contica*, vol. I (Oxford, 1963), p. xiv; cf., *Βυζαντινὴ Ἰμνογραφία*, p. 171.

66 according to Lemerle in the Preface of de Matons' *Romanos le Mélode*, p. vii.

67 according to de Matons himself, *Romanos le Mélode*, p. 3.

same day.<sup>68</sup> Hymns attributed to John of Damascus are the *eirmoi* (the first hymns) of the Salutations to the Theotokos (“Ανοίξω τὸ στόμα μου ...”), canons on Christmas, on the Epiphany, on the Pentecost, on the Resurrection.<sup>69</sup> The other well-known Christmas canon also by Cosmas of Maiumā, “Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε ...”, is a verbatim adaptation of the homily on the Nativity also by Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>70</sup> The fact, therefore, that the canon was developed and perfected by these Damascene hymnographers may not be insignificant or at all accidental.

If hymn writing has broadly been used as a teaching device of the doctrine by Orthodox and heretics alike (Nestorius' *Thaleia* is a case in point),<sup>71</sup> the creation of the canon considered in the context of the seventh-century Syro-Palestinian environment as a poetic theological treatise, concise, clear, attractive and easy to memorize, must be viewed as a deliberate creation of a survival device by the Damascene circle. Canons and other texts of John of Damascus were soon translated into Syriac. If public education, religious or secular, has ceased to exist, and if the Muslims allowed the *dhimmi*s freedom of worship, then worship especially in the context of the monastery had to be utilized fully as a means of cultivating and providing education; no wonder, therefore, that the monastic community of Mar Sabba became the centre of liturgical renewal as well, which attracted the Damascene intellectual and ecclesiastical elite. John of Damascus and Cosmas are credited with the revision of the typicon of Mar Sabba and are considered the originators of the services or Hours of the *Orthros* (Matins) and of the *Lychnicon*, the lamp-lighting Hour, another name for the Vespers service.<sup>72</sup> Both services revolve around the light, the symbol of Christ – another glimpse into the theological and spiritual language and communication of the Damascene-Sabbaitic “circle”. From the eighth century the Jacobites had adopted the Sabbaitic order of the Matins and imitated the canons. Also the *typika*, or liturgical orders, of Mar Sabba were introduced into the Church of the imperial Constantinople itself and, in final form of the Athonite reduction, they became “the definitive liturgical synthesis of the Byzantine rite under the hesychasts of the 14th century.”<sup>73</sup>

68 Trempeles, *Ἐκλογή*, p. 175; and Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία*, p. 435.

69 Trempeles, *Ἐκλογή*, p. xxxiii, n. 3.

70 Trempeles, *Ἐκλογή*, p. 186; Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία*, p. 435.

71 For the heretical hymnography, see, Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία*, p. 141 and in passim.

72 “... πρῶτον γράφειν ἀπήρξατο καὶ τὰ ποιήματα μελωδεῖν ... καὶ ἤρξατο συγγράφειν τὴν νῦν τελουμένην τοῦ Λυχνικοῦ καὶ Ὁρθρου ποίησιν ...”, *Analekta* IV, p. 279.

73 R.F.T. [Robert F. Taft], “Sabbaitic Typika”. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 1823. Cf. also the entries “Vespers”, “Orthros”, and “Horologion”, where relevant bibliography.



Along with hymnography the “circle” developed the presentation of theology in a systematic prosaic form. Beginning again with Sophronius, whose rhetorical sermons are also profoundly doctrinal in content, the Damascene “circle” reached its peak with John of Damascus, the acknowledged first systematic theologian of East and West. The tradition was passed on to Abū Qurra the writer of theological-apologetic treatises, and was extended to the unknown scholar-monk (ca. 850–870) composer of the first *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic, a compendium of monotheistic theology which now takes into account the doctrinal theses of Judaism and Islam.<sup>74</sup> In this process one may notice the evolution of systematic theology in the context of the Syro-Palestinian community under Islam. The pervasive motivation seems to have been the preservation, presentation and dissemination of the essentials of faith, in a summary, systematic, memorisable form for the sake of a community under siege. Even John of Damascus’ *Oration*s in defence of the icons are systematic, point-form like, theological treatises on the subject. Patriarch John Mercouropoulos, the author of one of his *vitae* who outlines two of these orations, calls them “*treatises in the form of letters*” (ἐπιστολιμαίως τόμους).<sup>75</sup>

Another type of writing which the “circle” cultivated was hagiography, a subject not only of ecclesiastical but also of instructional use in primary and secondary education. Of interest in this context is the fact that a significant number of hagiographies were written originally in Arabic! Paul Peeters has suggested that writing hagiographies in Arabic was an expression of indignation against the iconoclasts, who along with icons raged a war against the cult of the saints.<sup>76</sup> But this does not explain the phenomenon, as John of Damascus and his contemporaries wrote openly on the central issue of the icons in Greek, the language of the iconoclast Byzantium. The phenomenon of proliferation of hagiographies in Arabic seems to be pointing to pedagogical, ideological and pragmatic directions: to the liturgical renaissance which was taking place in the Syro-Palestinian region from the monastery of Mar Sabba; to the building of a safety net for the survival of the religious and spiritual identity of the Christian community under Muslim rule; and to the rising self-awareness and assertion of the Arabic speaking Syro-Palestinian community. Differences in

74 On the ms tradition and a brief presentation of this *summa*, see Griffith, “The Monks of Palestine ...”, pp. 24–26; and especially, his “A 9th century *Summa Theologiae Arabica*”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 226 (1986, pp.) 123–141.

75 *Analekta*, IV, p. 319.

76 “S. Romain le Néomartyr (+ 1 Mai 780) d’après un document géorgien”, *Analekta Bollandiana* 30 (1911), pp. 393–427, at 406. The life of St. Roman is placed between the years 730–780. Although of Greek descent and culture, he and St. Symeon, another contemporary of his, have not passed into the Byzantine hagiography.

style aside, the “circle” cultivated and excelled in the theological refinement, articulation and encapsulation of the doctrine. Verses, hymns, anthologies, prose, hagiographies were all employed for the same purpose. Others, like Abū Qurra, proved to be dialecticians. His “Question-and-answer” (ἔρωταποκρίσεις) method was mostly that of the intellectuals. However the masses had to be won and educated not with the dialectic method but with the simplicity and the power of memorization; thence poetry, lively lives of saints, music, symbols and the icon, all of them in the context of the drama of public worship. That is why the iconophiles took iconoclasm as a wholesale assault against the spirituality of the Church, the veneration of saints and the monastic life in general, and defended the icons as “open books for the illiterate”.<sup>77</sup>

### 3 A Monastic “Circle”

Monasticism in the Syro-Palestinian region, especially during the Umayyad era, was flourishing as a way of high spiritual and intellectual life.<sup>78</sup> It was, therefore, the natural environment which could fulfil the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of educated and spiritually inclined individuals. After he completed teaching John of Damascus and Cosmas, the learned Cosmas the Sicilian is purported to have begged his patron Mansūr to let him retire to the monastery. In pleading for his retirement he described a monk this way:

77 Stated earlier by Leontius of Cyprus and repeated subsequently by John of Damascus [“books open, manifestly exposed and venerated, for remembering God and for honouring him in the churches”; “books for the illiterate, and outspoken preachers of the honour due to the saints, teaching the viewers with a soundless voice and sanctifying the sense of sight”]. *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, I, 56; I, 17; I, 47 = II, 43; II, 10 = III, 9; Kotter, III, pp. 159, 93, 151, 99. On Leontius, another Sabbaitic monk prior to his becoming bishop of Neapolis of Cyprus, see, Nicholas Gentle, “Leontius of Neapolis: A Seventh Century Defence of Holy Images”, *Studia Patristica* 18,1 (Kalamazoo, 1985), pp. 135–8; Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, “Praying with Icons”, in Paul McPartlan, ed., *One in 2000? Towards Catholic-Orthodox Unity. Agreed Statements and Parish Papers* (London, 1993), p. 155. In the West the icons were accepted in the church and defended as “books for the illiterate” on the advice of Pope Gregory I (590–604) rather than on the basis of their theological connection to the reality of the incarnation and to the doctrine of salvation. Cf. James R. Payton, Jr. “Calvin and the Legitimation of Icons: His Treatment of the Seventh Ecumenical Council”, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993), pp. 222–241, where more bibliography on the *Libri Carolini* and Calvin’s theology on the icons.

78 On this well-known subject, see Derwas James Chitty, *The desert a city; an introduction to the study of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford, 1966); and also the archaeological evidence provided by Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, CT, 1992).

δεῖν γὰρ, φησὶν, εἶναι τὸν μοναχὸν σπουδαῖον, διακριτικόν, νηφάλιον, σώφρονα, κόσμιον, διδασκτικόν, οὐ τῆς ἐτέρων μᾶλλον διδασκαλίας δεόμενον, ὡς ἄρα δὴ μοι τὰ νῦν συμβέβηκεν, ἱκανόν τε τὸν νοῦν τηρεῖν ἀσφαλῶς<sup>79</sup>

The monk, according to this statement, must firstly be studious (σπουδαῖον) and, following this, discriminating or critical, alert, wise, of good manners, instructive and encyclopaedic! The implication is that one finds and cultivates such qualities in a monastic community. In fact, the Sicilian monk chose the monastic community of Mar Sabba as such an environment; so did his pupils John of Damascus and Cosmas who followed him there a few years later! The “circle” which had been formed by the school of Damascus continued its activity at Mar Sabba where most of its students converged.<sup>80</sup> During the period from the seventh to the tenth century the monasteries of Palestine had developed into centres of scholarly activity,<sup>81</sup> so much so that the monasteries of Mar Sabba, of St. Catherine’s at Sinai and of Mar Hariton were known as “scribal schools”.<sup>82</sup> By the nature of monasticism monastic communities were traditionally operating independently from Church and State authority.<sup>83</sup> The monastery, therefore, provided a particularly congenial and safe place for an intellectual and reform-minded “circle” such as the Damascene one to cultivate, pursue and protect its activities. John of Damascus and his adopted brother Cosmas entered Mar Sabba at an early age. A *vita* calls them “παιδιογέροντας” that is, young in age but mature in wisdom and spirit!<sup>84</sup> A nucleus of senior scholars and spiritual masters seems to have resided at Mar Sabba, because the abbot Nicodemus wanted to assign

79 *Analekta*, IV, p. 316.

80 Andreas, later bishop of Crete, tonsured by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, did not enter the monastery of Mar Sabba. After serving for a while at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem [*Analekta*, V, p. 171] he was sent to Constantinople as delegate to the VIIth Ecumenical Council, was ordained deacon of St. Sophia, was given responsibility of the orphanage, and subsequently elected bishop of Crete. He died at Erissos on the island of Mytilene (Lesvos) on July 4.

81 George Graf, *Die christlich-arabische Literatur bis zur fränkischen Zeit, eine literarhistorische Skizze* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1905), pp. 8–21; cf. Griffith, “The Monks of Palestine”, p. 6, n. 26.

82 W. Heffening, “Die griechische Ephraem-Paraenesis gegen das Lachen in arabische Übersetzung”. *Oriens Christianus* 24 (1927), 94–119, at 102; cf. Griffith, “The Monks of Palestine”, p. 6. For the significance of Mar Sabba monastery, see von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, pp. 25–44.

83 Cf., for example, the Justinian legislation pertaining to ascetics which shows the influence of monks on social and political affairs. Haldon, *Byzantium*, p. 294.

84 *Analekta*, IV, p. 328. At the time Cosmas was 26 years of age. *Analekta*, IV, p. 328. If Cosmas was three years older than John, John was 23 years of age! In fact, this *vita* makes him

the promising novice John to one of the “great men” from a group of spiritual and intellectual masters, whom the *vita* calls λογάδες (*logades*), literally, “servants of the word”, or reason, that is, *mutakalimūn*!<sup>85</sup> John’s mastering of the “word” and his literary production are testimonies to the kind of intellectual activity taking place at Mar Sabba. Among those early entrants to Mar Sabba was also Stephen, John’s nephew (“ἀδελφιδοῦν”) whom a *vita* calls “a plantation (or product) of John of Damascus’ erudition”,<sup>86</sup> who became abbot (προεστώς)<sup>87</sup> of the Sabbaitic community. Here we have, therefore, a clear allusion to a monastic intellectual and spiritual “plantation”, or “circle”, with John of Damascus as its central figure and mover.

The Umayyad era coincides with the monastic renaissance in the Syro-Palestinian region from the sixth century. The Qur’ān already contains frequent allusions and references to monks and anchorites, and traditions connect Muhammad’s life and development to learned monks. Many ideals, expressions and characteristic practices of earliest Islam (such as poverty, five daily prayers, vigils, prostrations, sobriety, ablutions, liturgical formulas, live call to prayer), and especially the rise of earliest Islamic asceticism in response to the Umayyad secularism, point to a direct relationship between Arab Syro-Palestinian Christianity and earliest Islam, this “democracy of married monks”.<sup>88</sup> The influence of monasticism on the earliest Muslim community is attested to by the “Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān as-Safā*), the third/ninth century Fatimid encyclopaedic philosophical society, which considered that an ideal person should be, among others, “as pious as a Greek [meaning Eastern Roman, i.e. Byzantine] monk”.<sup>89</sup>

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two years younger, 21 years of age: “πρώτον γὰρ ἔτος μετὰ τὴν εἰκάδα διήνην”. Detorakis, “Ανέκδοτος βίος”, p. 328.

85 “... ἐνὶ τῶν μεγάλων ἀνδρῶν παραδοῦναι τὸν νέηλυν [i.e. John of Damascus], ὃν ᾤετο τῆς ὄλης λογάδος τὸν ἔγκριτον ...” *Analekta*, IV, p. 340.

86 “... φυτεία καὶ αὐτὸς τοῦ ὀσίου πατρὸς ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασι”, *Analekta*, IV, p. 299.

87 *Analekta*, IV, p. 299.

88 This characteristic expression belongs to Said Husseyn Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, (Boston, 1972), p. 110. Cf. also Daniel J. Sahas, “Monastic ethos and spirituality and the origins of Islam”. *Proceedings of the 18th International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (Moscow, 1991; see Chapter 5 in this volume). On monasticism in Byzantium during this period, see Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp. 293 f.

89 Quoted by R.E. Henhausen, “The man-made setting. Islamic Art and Architecture” in B. Lewis, ed., *Islam and the Arab World* (N. York, 1976), p. 57.

#### 4 A “Circle” of Apologists-Dialecticians

Educated in classical subjects and trained in rhetoric, the contemporaries of John of Damascus seem to have pursued the dialectic-apologetic method rather than the dogmatic tradition followed by the Church, even though all of them were committed ecclesiastical figures. Even the unsophisticated, military-minded, Emperor Leo III being a Syrian, is depicted as an accomplished thinker and a skilled dialectician debating intricate theological and philosophical matters in the purported “Correspondence” with ‘Umar!<sup>90</sup> However, with questions brief, succinct, incisive and perceptive attributed to ‘Umar,<sup>91</sup> and with responses theologically intricate, dialectic and technical in character attributed to Leo, this “Correspondence” becomes immediately suspect. It makes one wonder whether this was not but a Christian apologetic technique aiming at mounting an effective and authoritative refutation of Islam by using the names of heads of state as two official interlocutors,<sup>92</sup> and at conveying the message that the conquerors of Christian land have been defeated by the sword of the Christian argument! Questions of authenticity notwithstanding, this “Correspondence”, as a phenomenon, confirms characteristics congenial to the Syrian intellectual culture into which Leo was born.

The production of apologetic writings against Christian heresies, the iconoclasts and especially against the contemporary “heresy of the Ishmaelites”, i.e. Islam, may be seen as an imitation and a revival by the Damascene “circle”

90 On the question of authenticity of this correspondence, see Jeffery, “Ghevond’s text”, pp. 269–276. Barnard treats it as genuine. *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background*, p. 23. H. Beck, before, had attributed the correspondence to a late-ninth or early-tenth century author. “Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung in der theologischen Literatur der Byzantiner”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 114 (1937) 43–46. A. Abel, a frequent sceptic of the authenticity of early Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, identifies Leo with Leo the Mathematician (ca. 790–after 869). “La lettre polémique ‘d’Aréthas’ à l’Émir de Damas”, *Byzantion*, 24 (1954) 348. Stephen Gero has also expressed doubts on the authenticity of this correspondence. *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain, 1973), pp. 153–171.

91 Muhammad ‘Abdallah Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam’s (727–829) biography of ‘Umar’s depicts him as an ideal ruler, bringing together edifying anecdotes, sermons, prayers, official correspondence and direct dealings with people. Franz Rosenthal, “Ibn Abd al-Hakam”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* vol. III (New Edition, Leiden, 1971), pp. 674–5.

92 It is also surprising that a lengthy, negative and name-calling response such as the one coming from an emperor would have produced, as Ghevond claims, “a very happy effect” for the Christians on behalf of a caliph. Jeffery, “Ghevond’s text”, p. 330.

of the classical rhetorical tradition.<sup>93</sup> Certainly in the dialogues of John of Damascus and of Abū Qurra one finds evidence of classical rhetoric in which proof lies in the demonstrative power of the argument rather than on an authority or on an authoritative statement; although one can also observe in the same writers that the demonstrative power of the argument is based upon the authoritative conviction of these writers. That is why their arguments become at times cyclic, or presuppose a *Christian* conviction.<sup>94</sup> Thus, treating Islam as a Christian heresy is something methodologically interesting (as it allows consideration of issues about the essential affinity between Christianity and Islam, and of what and how much these writers may be willing to concede to Islam), but from another point of view this methodology Christianizes its adversaries and “proves” to them something only on the basis of a perceived “common” *Christian* faith!

The Syro-Palestinian Christian community in general and the “circle” of John of Damascus in particular felt comfortable with, and took pride in imitating classical Greek antiquity.<sup>95</sup> They did not see Hellenism as incompatible to

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- 93 Manuals of rhetoric seem to have existed from the Roman and early Byzantine centuries. These were the *progymnasmata* (exercise manuals), called *χρεία* (lit. “need” from the “necessity” of tools) for the execution of rhetorical duties (“*χρειώδης δὲ οὖσα κατ’ ἐξοχὴν εἴρηται χρεία ὡς χρειωδέστερα πρὸς παραίνεσιν τῶν ἄλλων προγυμνασμάτων*”). I owe this information to my colleague H. Saradi from a paper of hers, “Dogmatism and the Classical tradition in Byzantium: the evidence of rhetoric”, presented at the symposium “Relativism, Scepticism and their anti-dogmatic criticism” (Ancient Olympia, 1990; unpublished).
- 94 Part of the technique of rhetoric was making reference to ancient tradition (*μαρτυρία τῶν παλαιῶν*). The authority of the person cited is in itself more persuasive than any maxim (*γνώμη* or *sententia*): “εἶγε πιστικωτέρα ἢ χρεία, διὰ τὸ τοῦ εἰρηκότος ἢ πράξαντος ἔνδοξον”. Saradi, “Dogmatism”, p. 4; thence, the production of *florilegia*, or anthologies of Biblical, patristic and conciliar quotations to defend a certain position. The Council of II Nicea (787) used this method to defend the theology of the icons. Before this council John of Damascus had compiled such a *florilegium* which he incorporated into one of his Orations in Defence of the Icons. Kotter, *Die Schriften*, III, pp. 168–200. This is an imitation (*μίμησις*, *imitatio*) of classical rhetoric which Byzantines loved to follow. Imitation was considered a virtue, not a weakness of a rhetorician. One may recall the pride with which John of Damascus states in the *prooimion* of his *magnum opus*, *Fount of Knowledge* that, “I will say nothing of my own” (“*ἔρω δὲ ἑμὸν μὲν οὐδέν*”. Kotter, *Die Schriften*, I, p. 53). One may also be reminded at this point that “innovation”, or “novelty” (*νεωτερισμός*), was perceived as heresy. Cf., for example, Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle* 13, PG 91: 517C. On innovation as heresy, see references in Demetrios J. Constantelos, “The Term Neoterikoi (Innovators) in the Exabiblos of Constantine Armenopoulos and Its Cultural-Linguistic Implications”, in Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Charanis Studies. Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1980), pp. 1–18. The same holds true in Islam where *bid‘a* (innovation) is tantamount to heresy.
- 95 The Damascene “circle” seems not only aware but also an admirer of classical Greek culture; indeed, the entire middle Byzantine period (seventh to eleventh century) imitates

Christianity, and they did not go through the Tertullian's dilemma ("What does Jerusalem have in common with Athens?"). They adopted instead the ethos of the Cappadocians.<sup>96</sup> John of Damascus, repeating the words of Gregory of Nazianzus,<sup>97</sup> bequeaths to his readers the teachings of the Fathers along with the legacy and the ethos of the Syro-Palestinian Christian apologetics and rhetoric. It is to this quality of inclusiveness that one may want to attribute the unique treatment which Islam received from the Syro-Palestinians, a methodology distinct not only from that of the Western but even from that of the Constantinopolitan Christendom.<sup>98</sup>

As controversialists they wrote "dialogues", or *dialexeis*, between mostly fictitious interlocutors Orthodox and heretics, or Christians and non-Christians. Among the dialecticians of the "circle" the most ardent and controversial proved to be Abū Qurra.<sup>99</sup> He did not only write but he did in public what John of Damascus envisioned and pre-enacted in private.<sup>100</sup> He engaged himself in an open dialogue-debate with Muslims using argumentation and rationality; so much so that he was criticized for his method by the Jacobite Habīb b. Hidma Abū Rā'ita and prompted the Muslim *mutakallim* 'Isā b. Sabīh al-Murdār, one of the early chiefs of the Mu'tazilah, to write a treatise "Against Abū Qurra, the Christian".<sup>101</sup> He was, however, an effective dialectician who in the opinion of the Jacobites, "because he was a sophist and engaged in dialectics with the

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not the Roman but the preceding classical Greek life and culture. Cf. Treadgold, "The Break in Byzantium", p. 301. Certainly, Treadgold's analysis finds support in the collective picture of this Damascene "circle".

- 96 Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus' assertion, "Ἀθήνας τὰς χρυσὰς ὄντως ἐμοὶ καὶ τῶν καλῶν προξένους". *Gregory of Nazianzus, Discours funèbres en l'honneur de son frère Césaire et de Basil de Césarée*, ed. and tr. by F. Boulenger (Paris, 1908), p. 86; and the views of Basil of Caesarea expressed in his "Πρὸς τοὺς νέους. Ὅπως ἄν ἐξ Ἑλληνικῶν ὀφελοῖντο λόγων". For a critical review of the so-called positive attitude of the East towards classical studies, see Lemerle's discussion in ch. III of his *Le premier humanisme*, in passim.
- 97 "τὸν τῆς μελίσης τρόπον μιμούμενος, τοῖς οἰκείοις τῆς ἀληθείας συνθήσομαι, καὶ παρ' ἐχθρῶν σωτηρίαν καρπώσομαι". Kotter, *Die Schriften*, I, p. 52.
- 98 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, "The Art and non-art of Byzantine Polemics. Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature". In *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi (Toronto, 1990), pp. 55–73 (see Chapter 6 in this volume).
- 99 On Abū Qurra, see Sidney Harrison Griffith, "The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurra (c. 750–c. 820 AD). A Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature" (Ph. D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1978).
- 100 Cf. John of Damascus' *Διάλεξις Σαρακηνοῦ καὶ Χριστιανοῦ (Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni)*, Kotter, IV, 421–438; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 99–122.
- 101 *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm; a Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. and tr. by Bayard Dodge, 2 vols (New York, 1970), vol. I, p. 394. Cf. also Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine", p. 23.

pagans [i.e. the Muslims], and knew the Saracen language, he was the object of wonder to the simple folk".<sup>102</sup> The dialogue as a controversial technique was also the characteristic of the earliest Islamic philosophy, or *kalām*, in the narrow sense of the word. Van Ess has aptly described the method as follows:

The opponent is confronted with a doctrine which he himself considers to be true, or with a statement which draws its authority out of itself, e.g. a verse of the Qur'ān [in the case of Christianity, the Bible]. Then in a series of questions normally put in the form of a dilemma which does not leave him any opportunity for evasive answering, he is forced to admit a consequence which contradicts his own thesis, or the untenable nature of all its implications. The dialogue always aims at a merciless reduction to silence.<sup>103</sup>

The criticism of Abū Qurra is reminiscent of the accusations which John of Damascus received from his iconoclast opponents as being "Saracen-minded", "insulter of Christ and conspirator against the empire", and "teacher of impiety and perverter of the sacred Scripture".<sup>104</sup> The last accusation implies actually a dialectic ability which John of Damascus used in order to reverse the prohibition by the iconoclasts of the icons on the basis of a monolithic interpretation of Exodus, 20: 4–5, for a theology in favour of the icons on the basis or as a necessity of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines!

## 5 A Circle of Arab Intellectuals

This "circle" is the last group of Syro-Palestinian writers before the Arabization of the Christian literature who spoke and wrote in Greek; yet they all were deeply rooted into the Syriac-Arab culture. What has been said about Cosmas as being a "fils de la Syrie, pensait en syrien et chantait en grec", holds true also for John of Damascus and his colleagues. In fact, Emereau's quotation is even more specific:

102 Recorded by Michael the Syrian (d. 1199); cf. Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine", p. 23.

103 J. van Ess, "Early Development of *Kalām*", in Juynboll, *Studies*, pp. 109–123, at 109.

104 Mansi, XIII: 356D; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 4–9.



son [Cosmas'] oeuvre n'a fait que cavaliser la brillante civilisation sémitique, qu'elle a ensuite transmise sous une forme n-chrétienne aux Hellènes et, par l'intermédiaire de ses derniers, aux Slaves,<sup>105</sup>

one should add here, "et aux Arabes"!

John of Damascus and his "circle" exerted a sense of pride in their Syriac-Arab culture and were feeling at home even within the Arab environment irrespective of Islam. He was raised in the Umayyad court and served its administration as a third generation civil servant. Miraculous and hagiological though this might be, a John of Damascus' *vita*, from two sixteenth-century manuscripts, which narrates almost exclusively the legendary healing of his amputated hand, is in itself a testimony to Arab solidarity and loyalty: after the caliph confronted John with the evidence of his alleged plot, John delivered a forceful oration in self-defence underlining his loyalty to the caliph and to his administration. The caliph accepted John's defence, insisted on his remaining in his post; he even believed in the miracle that had taken place, he was converted to Christianity and was baptized by John himself with the Christian name ... Nicephorus (meaning "Bearer of victory"!)<sup>106</sup> – a name which superimposes the caliph over the Byzantine βασιλεύς, makes him a champion of icons and a symbol of victory over the emperor who happened to be an iconoclast! Rhetoric and pious exaggeration notwithstanding, the hagiological perception remains intact: John of Damascus and the Damascene "circle" are identified more with the Arab (and Muslim) than with the Byzantino-Constantinopolitan environment; something which historical evidence corroborates.<sup>107</sup> In fact, this is the only *vita* which brings John of Damascus to Constantinople in order to reprobate Leo III, and claims that he died there.<sup>108</sup> No other *vita* or reference whatsoever connects John of Damascus and Constantinople, physically.

105 C. Emereau, *Saint Ephrem le Syrien. Son œuvre littéraire grecque* (Paris, 1919), p. 103. Earlier Cassiodorus (ca. 487–ca. 580) had observed that the Syriac Church was different from the "Byzantine" and more progressive.

106 Detorakis, "La main coupée", p. 381.

107 There seems to be a traditional enmity between Constantinopolitans and Syrians. Either because of difference in culture or because of difference in doctrine, few of the latter retained friendly relations with Constantinople. Monks and ascetics especially from Syria projecting a life style and appearance different to that of the capital, or perceived as heretics (from the fourth century there was a pervasive impression of Syria as "Arabia terra haeresiorum"), were confronted in Constantinople with hostility. For this insight I am indebted to Helen Saradi's research on "Constantinople and its saints (IVth–VIth c.): the image of the city and social considerations", still unpublished.

108 Detorakis, "La main coupée", p. 381.

Such a distance might have been nothing more than unintentional and coincidental, but it is also symbolic.

## 6 A Reform-Minded “Circle”

Iconoclasm and the rise of Islam (two inter-related events) render the seventh century as the most crucial century in the history of Byzantium.<sup>109</sup> It is the century which marks the “before” and “after” of Byzantine history, the century of a series of reductions of the Byzantine Empire. As we indicated earlier, for some Byzantinists evidence of dissolution of cities and city life, scarcity in secular literature, dismantling of the coin economy, barbarization of the law, etc., constitute proofs of discontinuity of Byzantium from the classical era. This view, however, does not take into consideration in the area of literature, for example, systematic-theological writings, ἐρωταποκρίσεις (questions-answers), apologetic and controversial writings, as well as the ecclesiastical arts (iconography and hymnography) as evidence of an intellectual activity which one finds flourishing during the seventh century, especially in the eastern provinces of Byzantium which came under Islam. This revival was neither accidental nor coincidental; it can be better understood in the context of the events of the seventh century.

Viewed from the geographical and cultural vantage point of the Damascene circle, and being affected differently than the rest of the Byzantines, Iconoclasm and the rise of Islam represented two sides of apocalyptic proportions of the same coin, that of the beginning of the end of the Church as an official, imperial, institution. As not staunch supporters of the “imperial” dimension of Christianity and ideologically convinced of the transforming nature and power of Christianity, the Syro-Palestinians were not about to become the pall bearers of the Byzantine Church, but rather the architects of the survival of Christianity as a personal and communal experience based on spirituality, and cultivated through worship, sound reason and articulation of the essentials of faith. The Reformation of Eastern Christendom, one may want to say, began in Damascus and more broadly in the Syro-Palestinian region in the seventh century. The roots of this Reformation go deeper in history, but they became manifest and culminated in the seventh century because of iconoclasm and the rise of Islam. The fundamental difference between the Western and this Eastern Reformation is that the latter did not result in a break but in a reduction and in a catharsis of the shrinking body, from within.

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109 Cf. note 1; see also the Introduction in Palmer's *The Seventh Century*, pp. xi–xxviii.

One may wonder what motivation and purpose there could possibly have been for the Damascene circle in writing masterpieces of systematic theology in Greek and in Arabic other than the survival of faith; or in composing theology in hymns; or in itemizing and articulating the tenets and practices of Islam; or in offering guidelines and examples of dialectic refutation of Islam; or in strengthening monastic life and individual spirituality; or in revising and enhancing the worship typicon – all these activities taking place during the later and unfriendlier period of the Umayyad era, within the Syro-Palestinian region, headed by someone who had served in the Umayyad court and who had left this post for the solitude of Mar Sabba? One *vita* of John of Damascus offers the explanation succinctly:

Μετὰ τοῦτο καινόν τι καὶ θαύματος ἄξιον μηχανόμενος, τὴν τῶν δογμάτων ἀκριβειαν ἐν μέλεσιν ὑπογράφεται· ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οἶδε πρὸς μὲν τὸν πόνον ὀκνηροτέρους πολλούς, πρὸς δὲ τὰ μέλη διακεχυμένους καὶ νεύοντας, μίγνυσι τὸ δόγμα τοῖς ἄσμασιν, ἵν' ὅπερ πόνος οὐκ ἦνυσε, μέλος κατορθώσῃ καὶ ἡ πίστις μὴ λωβηθῇ.<sup>110</sup>

For the particular hagiographer the work of John of Damascus and of his colleagues was something new, extraordinary and admirable; or a reformation for the time, even if he is not calling it so! The statement is a clear evidence of the perception, if not of the explicit intention of John of Damascus and of his contemporaries: that systematic theology, poetry and all ecclesiastical arts were cultivated in order to uplift and stimulate the spirit of the masses under Muslim occupation, “so that faith may not be maimed” or wither in a rapidly Islamized Syria!<sup>111</sup>

Also, although there may be reasons making the fourteenth century *vita* of John of Damascus from the Chalke monastery by an anonymous writer suspect of its historical accuracy,<sup>112</sup> it is interesting to read in this text how subsequent generations, most likely of non Syro-Palestinian origin, perceived its two

110 “After this [i.e. after writing his systematic theology and the orations in defence of the icons] he invented something admirable and new: to translate the exactness [or, the orthodoxy] of the doctrine into melody; for he knew that many were among those who were becoming slothful to sustain the effort while [on the other hand] they were effusive and receptive to music. He mingled [therefore] the doctrine with singing so that which was not attainable through struggle, music may attain so that faith may not be maimed” [or truncated, or dishonoured]. *Analekta*, IV, p. 348.

111 At this point one may want to recall what was said earlier regarding the defence of the icons as “an open book for the illiterate”. Cf. above, n. 77.

112 *Analekta* IV, pp. 271–302.

heroes, John of Damascus and Cosmas. The text presents John of Damascus travelling from Syria to Egypt to Persia, teaching and baptizing people, and being admired by Chosroes, king of the Persians. It makes him also author of controversial orations against Constantine v Copronymus (741–775) from Persia.<sup>113</sup> However, what is implicit in these otherwise anachronistic statements is the impression of an active missionary role which these Damascenes played in defence and for the survival of the Christian faith in the Near East, Syria, Egypt and Persia under non-Christian rule. Systematic theology which the “circle” cultivated in various and complimentary forms (treatises, refutations, hymns, canons, icons, church services) was not a purely intellectual exercise; it seems to have been motivated by a spirit of reformation for the survival and the enhancement of the personal and of the Church life. One wonders also whether the Arabic *Summa Theologiae* by the unknown monastic author, and the fact that Abū Qurra’s treatise on the veneration of the icons are found *in the same Ms*, is not a palaeographical accident but a confirmation of a conscientious tradition in which theology is one, and “systematic” and “expressive” theology only complement each other; the case certainly applies to John of Damascus.<sup>114</sup>

A Christian systematic theology *in Arabic* does not only provide identity and support for the Arabic speaking Christians; it also builds a bridge of communication between Christianity and Islam. The Damascene “circle” was well equipped to engage in dialogue with the Muslims. Most of its members were Arabic speaking and some, like John of Damascus, were familiar even with “τὰς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν βίβλους”.<sup>115</sup> Arabic was widely understood and used

113 *Analekta*, IV, p. 280. The *vita* confuses completely the Arab caliph with Chosroes and Leo with Constantine to whom he attributes the incident of John of Damascus’ amputation of the hand (pp. 281–2). Its author is also impressed by John of Damascus’ education and hymnographical writings, such as Easter canons, *stichera* on holidays related to the life of Christ, on the holidays of the Theotokos and of saints, *katanyctika*, *martyrika*, canons of supplication and festive canons.

114 I cannot offer an expert opinion on whether these two texts come from the same hand; this has been done by others and it is still under debate. Griffith, “A ninth-century *Summa*”, pp. 128–136. However, in light of what we have observed in this paper, it is tempting to raise the following questions: Is it possible to speculate that the author of the *Summa* is unknown (more precisely, not mentioned in the *Ms*) because there is no reason to be named, since his name is mentioned in the treatise on the icons? Is it possible also to suppose that the two treatises, that on the icons and the *Summa*, form together some kind of a whole and that the latter serves as a kind of conclusion for the former; or that the treatise on the icons prompts the author to give an exposition of the Christian faith as a whole, especially because of the rule of Islam?

115 *Analekta*, IV, p. 273. The expression may mean not simply books in Arabic but Muslim books, possibly the Qur’ān, folk Arabic poetry and literature, and perhaps, the developing Hadith. Cf. also Sahas, “The Arab character”, p. 185.

at Mar Sabba,<sup>116</sup> and by the beginning of the ninth century it had become the living language for its monks. In the eighth century Syro-Palestinians were actually writing in Arabic and, as Griffith has shown, the first Christian texts “of Christian *Kalām*, or controversial, apologetic theology in the Islamic milieu” were written in old Palestinian Arabic in this century, the century of the flourishing of the Damascene “circle”.<sup>117</sup> This is another evidence of an Arab Christian renaissance aiming at providing the captive Church with the tools of survival under Islamic rule.

Although few in number in comparison to Church books, these apologetic books were significant in providing a blueprint for the developing Muslim *kalām*. The earliest Christian text in Arabic dated around 740 (that is, *before* the death of John of Damascus) is an appendix to the Arabic version of the Acts of the Apostles, entitled “A Treatise On the Triune Nature of God”.<sup>118</sup> As John of Damascus dealt with the same subject extensively in his *De Fide Orthodoxa*<sup>119</sup> and, as he correctly detected that this is the key point of divergence between Islam and Christianity, one might not be very wrong in suggesting that this treatise might be a product of the “circle”, one of those “διὰ φωνῆς” of John of Damascus, at a time of an accelerated process of Arabization and of cultural cross-fertilization in the end of the seventh century.<sup>120</sup>

## 7 Concluding Remarks

The exodus of Islam from the confines of the Arabian Peninsula and its transition from a nomadic to an urban community during the Umayyad caliphate, with the Hellenistic metropolis of Damascus as its capital, created a new theocratic Empire rivalling that of the Christian Byzantium and posing upon Byzantium new challenges. This development had also immediate visible repercussions for the Muslim *umma*, a growing secularization, imperialization, sectarianism and the challenge of a Muslim version of asceticism. For the

116 Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 45–7.

117 Griffith, “The Monks of Palestine”, p. 20, and pp. 13 ff. on the use of Arabic in the region.

118 Now awaiting publication by P. Samir Khalil, the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies, Rome. Cf. Griffith, “The monks of Palestine”, pp. 18 (n. 87), 21.

119 Cf. Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, 1976) in passim. On the politico-ideological causes within the Muslim community which gave rise to theological debates (the Kharijite-Murjite, the Jabrite-Qadarite-Mu‘tazilite and the Sunni-Jahmite debate) and on the possible direct influence of John of Damascus on Islamic theology, see Sahas, “The Arab character”, pp. 200–2.

120 This process is attested to also by the gradual use of the Muslim calendar; an indication that Christians started getting accustomed to living under Muslim rule and adopting Muslim modes of life; cf. Griffith “The Monks of Palestine”, p. 17.

Byzantine Empire this new reality called for a radical re-assessment of its political, ecclesiastical, cultural and spiritual priorities and values. With the exception of the political priorities, this re-assessment of cultural, ecclesiastical and spiritual priorities did not originate in Byzantium proper; it was activated by a “circle” of ideologue Syrian Christians of the kind of John of Damascus, a “remnant” of pre-Islamic and a link with post Islamic, Byzantium. They, as the Cappadocians had earlier Christianized Hellenism, Arabicized Christianity through the media of their Hellenistic and Syriac culture with which they were equipped.

This “circle” is, perhaps, a snap-shot of the urban Syrian society at the time, a society with a “skin-deep” Hellenistic culture,<sup>121</sup> while the rural population remained deeply embedded into their indigenous Semitic tradition.<sup>122</sup> However this is, perhaps, a “simplistic view of the superficiality of Hellenism in the Near East”. In Bowersock’s words, “what gave late antique paganism its strength and coherence was the extraordinary flexibility of Greek traditions themselves in responding to local needs”.<sup>123</sup> A demonstration of this “flexibility” is the type of tradition (poetry, hymnography, systematic theology, dialectics, worship, as well as the Arabic idiom) which the Damascene “circle” moulded for its own society at a time when the Syrian Graeco-Hellenistic Christian culture was undergoing the most profound test for its survival. It succeeded in preserving, renewing and disseminating Christianized Hellenism through the medium of the Arab Syro-Palestinian culture.

In concluding his “Jerome Lectures”, and with reference to the Syro-Palestinian Hellenism, Bowersock poses the question:

I have often asked myself how it must have felt to have lived through the Islamic conquests with all the accumulated baggage of the Hellenic-Semitic East, both Christian and pagan. How different would one have felt looking back? How would the passage of time have affected one’s view of the past and one’s sense of continuity with it?<sup>124</sup>

121 Cf. P.K. Hitti, *A History of the Arabs* (London, 1970), p. 153; *idem*, *History of Syria* (New York, 1951), p. 417.

122 The foreign character of Syria has been suggested as one of the reasons for the spectacular defeat of Heraclius and the Byzantines in Syria by the Arab Muslims. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990), p. 71; and Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 92 and 94.

123 *Hellenism*, p. 72.

124 *Hellenism*, p. 81.

Inherently, perhaps, the question which the contemporary *literati* of the class of John of Damascus posed on themselves was not so much with reference to the past as it was with reference to the future: "How different, or essentially similar, should we remain in the future? How will the present affect our destiny and our sense of continuity with our past?" It is under the light of such questions, I think, that one can understand better the life and work of John of Damascus himself and of however one may want to coin the group of his contemporary colleagues!

## The Arab Character of the Christian Disputation with Islam: The Case of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)

What qualifies John of Damascus as a pioneer figure in the history of the Muslim-Christian relations are his ancestral Syrian Arab lineage, and his Christian upbringing; his familiarity with “τὰς τῶν Σαρακηνῶν βιβλίους”<sup>1</sup> and his long and close connection with the court of the Umayyad caliphate; and the vast and seminal literature he produced on various aspects of the Christian tradition and faith,<sup>2</sup> including his writings on Islam, short though they might be. It is on these three areas, therefore, that we will refocus our attention,<sup>3</sup> in an attempt to present the *phenomenon* of John of Damascus, as an *Arab Christian* interlocutor with Islam.

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- 1 Cf. *Vita* in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias* [Bruxelles, (1897) 1973], p. 273. The expression might not necessarily imply the Qur’ān and the developing Hadith but, probably, folk Arabic literature, as the “Ordinance of ‘Umar” prohibits Christians from teaching others the Qur’ān. Unless one wants to suggest that Muslim officials in the Umayyad court tutored John in the Qur’ān – something which would border on proselytism. Cf. A.S. Tritton, *Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects: Critical Study of the Covenant of ‘Umar* (Totowa, N.J. 1930, 1970). The evidence is too sketchy to support either one of these theses conclusively.
  - 2 A critical edition of the works of John of Damascus was undertaken by the late P. Bonifatius Kotter of the Byzantine Institute at Scheyern. Five volumes have already been published in the series *Patristische Texte und Studien* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York), under the general title *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos: I. Institutio Elementaris. Capita Philosophica (Dialectica)* (1969); II. *Expositio Fidei* (1973); III. *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres* (1975); IV. *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica* (1981); V. *Opera homiletica et hagiographica* (1988). Subsequently referred to as Kotter, volume and page number. On the Institute, see Franz Dölger in *Byzantion* 20 (1950), pp. 303–14 and D.Bf.M., “L’Institut Byzantin de Scheyern et l’œuvre de S. Jean Damascène”, *Irénikon* 31 (1958), pp. 510–2.
  - 3 For a more detailed discussion of some of these topics, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam. The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972); “John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited”, *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984–1985), pp. 104–118 (see Chapter 18 in this volume); “The Art and non-art of Byzantine Polemics in Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature”, in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi (Toronto, 1990), pp. 55–73 (see Chapter 6 in this volume), where additional bibliography.



The implication of this examination may be that (much to the discomfort of Patrologists and historians of Christian thought) we might need to re-read John of Damascus' entire body of literature under the light of two major contemporary and related developments: the looming decline of Orthodox Christianity as an Empire under the experience of Iconoclasm, and the rising of a "heretical" Empire under the experience of the conquests and the spread of Islam; John Meyendorff has already given evidence to allusions to Islam in his hymns.<sup>4</sup> One may also be able to support the thesis that, given the intermingled character of the text of his three Orations in defence of the icons, John of Damascus wrote some of his earliest notes on the subject in response to Beser's influence upon the iconoclastic policies of Yazid II (720–4), rather than in response to Leo III's edict (726) against the icons.<sup>5</sup>

## 1 John of Damascus as a Syrian Arab

The life of John of Damascus coincides with a crucial period in the history of Byzantium and Islam. It is the period of the expansion of Islam into Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and of the withdrawal of the Byzantines from these former Eastern provinces. In three rapid phases extending to no longer than fifteen years (633–647/8), the Muslim armies had conquered the countryside and all the prominent cities of greater Syria. During the first phase (633) the open countryside in Southern Syria was occupied. During the second phase (634–7) major battles between the Muslims and the Byzantines resulted in devastating defeats for the Byzantine forces, and in the conquest or capitulation of major Syrian cities, such as Bostra, Gaza, Fahl (Pella), Baysān (Beth Sham, Skythopolis), Damascus, Hims (Emesa) and Ba'labakk (Heliopolis). During the third phase (637–647/8), and particularly after the battle of Yarmuk, the Muslims consolidated their control over the entire Syria, including the coastal regions. They then directed their attention to Egypt (fall of Alexandria in 641/2) and initiated annual attacks against Constantinople itself (siege of Constantinople in 670). Jerusalem, the holy City of Christendom, had

4 "Byzantine Views of Islam," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), pp. 115–132, at 117–8.

5 Cf. Mansi, 13:197 and A.A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, AD 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9–10 (1955–1956), pp. 25–47, at 31.

already capitulated to ‘Umar in 638. The events of the expansion of Islam were, therefore, precipitous and, indeed, traumatic.<sup>6</sup>

The exodus of Islam from its Arabian desert confines, and the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate (661–750) with a seat in the Syro-Hellenistic metropolis of Damascus created a new outlook for the Muslim *umma*; one of a theocratic patriarchal, or rather royal, Empire rivalling that of the Christian Byzantium.<sup>7</sup> This development called for a re-assessment of the political and doctrinal alliances of the Byzantine Empire, and for a re-evaluation of its spiritual priorities and theological values. It is in this general context in which John of Damascus – a “remnant” and a specimen of pre-Islamic Byzantium, and a link with post Islamic Byzantium – lived.

Only John of Damascus himself (or, more properly, Yuhanna b. Mansūr b. Sargūn) is known by his Christian and monastic name “John presbyter and monk”,<sup>8</sup> or by his most common appellation “John of Damascus”. His father, Mansūr b. Sargūn, and his grand-father, Sargūn b. Mansūr are known by their Syrian Arab names. Mansūr is a familiar name among the peoples of the Arab tribes of Kalb and Taghlib,<sup>9</sup> both of whom (especially the former and more powerful one of the two) stretched from the oasis of Dūmat al-Jandal in the south to the outskirts of Palmyra, northeast of Damascus. The Banū Kalb played an important role in the Arab-Byzantine relations.<sup>10</sup> One may want to consider the role which the Banū Kalb played through Ibn al-Kalbi in preserving in an oral tradition the pre-Islamic religion of the Arabs, and in connecting organically Islam with Abraham and his religion. Members of the tribe allied

6 For a summary reconstruction of the events, based on Muslim sources, see Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N.J., 1981), pp. 91–155. For the Byzantine-Christian reaction to the conquests, see Walter Emil Kaegi Jr. “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest”, *Church History* 38 (1969), pp. 139–49; D.J. Constantelos, “The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as revealed in the Greek Sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries”, *Byzantion* 42 (1972), pp. 325–57; John Moorhead, “The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions”, *Byzantion* 51 (1981), pp. 579–91. The Muslim accounts of wars are lengthy and more detailed. The Christian ones are, for obvious reasons, fewer and sketchy. An exception is the last part of the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiou (late seventh c.), describing some of the phases of the conquest of Egypt. *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiou*, translated from Zotenberg’s Ethiopic text by R.H. Charles (Oxford, 1916).

7 Cf. *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1A, eds. P.M. Holt *et al.* (Cambridge, 1970), ch. 3.

8 Cf. PG 94:1421; cf. also the anonymous *Vita* in Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta* vol. 4, p. 273; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 8.

9 Joseph Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas, son époque, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, 1923), p. 14, n.5.

10 Cf. Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C. 1984), pp. 84n., 382, and 388. On the Banū Kalb see also the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4, pp. 492–4.

with Muhammad, but they turned away from this alliance after his death.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Banū Kalb appears consistently hostile towards Islam; a hostility which could have been engineered by the Byzantine emperors and rewarded with trusting administrative positions, such as the collection of taxes.

John of Damascus belonged to a deeply-rooted Syrian family which, however, as most families in the upper class intelligentsia, had been affected “only skin deep” by Hellenistic culture.<sup>12</sup> A *Vita* of Cosmas, the adopted brother of John of Damascus and later bishop of Maiumā (ca. 674/6–ca. 751/2),<sup>13</sup> dated probably from the eleventh century, makes the father of John of Damascus unable to speak Greek and in need of a translator in order to communicate with Cosmas the Sicilian, the tutor of John and Cosmas.<sup>14</sup> In the same *Vita* John of Damascus’ father is consistently mentioned as “Mansūr”, with the explanation that this was his indigenous name by which he was called (“τῆ ἐγχωρίῳ λέξει πατρόθεν ὀνομαζόμενος”).<sup>15</sup> It is worth mentioning also that the existing *Vita* of John of Damascus is a Greek translation by John, Patriarch of Jerusalem, from an *Arabic* original, written between 808–969.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the general iconoclastic climate and the official hostility of the Greek speaking Byzantium toward the cult of saints might have been the cause of composing the life of an ardent iconophile in Arabic rather than in Greek,<sup>17</sup> one can also read in this action the Arab Christian desire to affirm John of Damascus as the product of Syro-Palestinian *Arab* Christianity, and a saintly man of *Arab* Christian descent and spirituality. In fact, three out of five existing *vitae* have originated in Jerusalem, John of Damascus entered the famous monastery of Mar Sabbas which was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and he was ordained to the priesthood by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

11 Donner, *Conquests*, pp. 106–7. Abu Bakr appointed ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās and Walid b. ‘Uqba to bring these tribes back to the Medinan fold by force. *Ibid.*, pp. 110–1.

12 P.K. Hitti, *History of Syria* (N. York, 1951), p. 417.

13 *Vita Athoniensis Laurae* (*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* 394b, *Auctarium*, p. 53) ff. 150r–157v.

14 “Ὁ δὲ παραλαβὼν καὶ τῶν δεσμῶν ἀπολύσας διηρώτα τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν δι’ ἐρμηνέως, οὐ γὰρ τὴν Ἑλλήνων φωνὴν ἐπεπαίδευτο, τὴν Σύρων δὲ μᾶλλον ὡς πάτριον οὔσαν ἐξήσκητο”. Théocharis Detorakis, “Vie inédite de Cosmas le Mélode. BHG 394b”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 99 (1981), pp. 101–16, at 109; the emphasis is ours.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 107; cf. also p. 109.

16 PG 94:432A, 433B, 489A. B. Hemmerdinger, “La *Vita* arabe de Saint Jean Damascène et BHG 884”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 28 (1962), pp. 442–3.

17 Cf. P.P. (Paul Peeters), “S. Romain le Neomartyr (m. à Mai 780) d’après un document géorgien”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 30 (1911), pp. 393–427, at 406.

18 PG 94:480f, and 439, n.4.

Exact dates of John of Damascus' life remain still a matter of conjecture. There seems to be some agreement that his death must be placed in the year 749 or 750, definitely before 754, the year of the Iconoclastic Council of Hieria which condemned him and presumed him dead. However, the date of his birth, which is usually stated as the year 670, remains highly conjectural. I have ventured to place it in 655 (or even earlier, in 652) on the basis of his alleged companionship with the young prince Yazid (n. 642–647, or on 644) and the Christian poet Akhtāl (n. ca. 640), and with consideration to the arrival in Damascus of Cosmas the Sicilian (ca. 664) who served as his tutor.<sup>19</sup> Any later date of birth would make him far too young a companion for caliph Yazid, and would abrogate the widely acclaimed teacher-pupil relationship between Cosmas and John of Damascus.<sup>20</sup> Born on either an earlier or later date, the fact remains that John of Damascus' life coincides with the life of the Umayyad caliphate and the debut of an Islamic empire which was seeking to replace the Christian and Hellenistic empire of the Byzantines.

Greek *Vitae* and other sources make three generations of Mansūrs financial advisors to the Umayyad caliphs.<sup>21</sup> John of Damascus' father is presented as a most devout Christian,<sup>22</sup> and protector of the interests of the

19 Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 38–9. One lacuna that might be found in Nasrallah's reference to Abū 'l-Faraj al-Asfahani's *Kitāb al-Aghāni* xvi, 70 is that this source speaks of Sargun as Yazid 1's habitual commensal; probably of John of Damascus's father than of John himself. There is no clear evidence also as to when Cosmas was freed. If Cosmas was freed during the caliphate of Mu'awiya (661–80), John must have been born in ca. 652. If he was freed during the caliphate of 'Adl al-Malik (685–705), John must have been born ca. 670 or a bit earlier, in order to be about twelve years of age, when Cosmas became his tutor, as the Greek sources indicate.

20 A. Khoury in his review of Sahas' *John of Damascus* [*Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 58 (1974) 150–1] finds the argument "interesting", although he questions the dates of 655 or 652 for John's birth, on the ground that any such early date would make John of Damascus 88 or 90 years of age when he presumably wrote his magnum opus *Fount of Knowledge* (743). On the sources and arguments of this topic, see Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 38–41. The basis of this objection, albeit reasonable, is inadequate, as one has to assume that, even if the *Fount of Knowledge* can be firmly dated in 743, its material had been compiled by John of Damascus much earlier. The content of this work is the product of a long, erudite study, and its known form is the result of various revisions made by John of Damascus himself. Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 53, n.2

21 Theophanes, *Chronographia* [ed. C. de Boor, (Rome) Bardi, 1963], p. 559. Michael the Syrian has John of Damascus' father as "secretary" or financial advisor of 'Adl al-Malik (685–705), serving at least up to the year 695. See, *Chronique*, II, 474f; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, pp. 561–9, and Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 26–8.

22 "ἀνὴρ χριστιανικώτατος". Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 559.

Christians,<sup>23</sup> of the Orthodox faith,<sup>24</sup> of the poor, and of the captives.<sup>25</sup> His upbringing was Christian and his earliest education, in Syriac and Arabic.<sup>26</sup> Syriac literature was at the time too insignificant to have been a major element in John of Damascus' reading, with the exception of the Syriac ascetic literature.<sup>27</sup> His exposure to poetry early in his life and his friendship with the Christian poet Akhtāl, must have contributed to his development and that of his adopted brother Cosmas as two of the most prominent hymnographers of the Byzantine Church. The Greek sources praise the Damascene as having learned the Greek language fast,<sup>28</sup> and as having mastered history, mythology, philosophy, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy and theology.<sup>29</sup> Aristotelian logic was known in Syria, as it was used by the feuding Jacobite and Nestorian sects on doctrinal matters.<sup>30</sup> However, it was the Orthodox captive Cosmas who must have been the source of John of Damascus' knowledge of logic, rather than either one of these sects. Orthodoxy, in which John of Damascus had been raised, was not simply a matter of doctrinal preference for Syrian Orthodox; it was also a matter of identity and hope. As doctrinal divisions and hostility between the Jacobites and the Nestorians had weakened

23 He convinced 'Abd al-Malik not to remove the columns of the Church of Gethsemane for the purpose of rebuilding the mosque of Mecca (691), with the promise that he would ask Emperor Justinian II (685–695) to send him new columns in their place. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 559.

24 Michael the Syrian, a Monophysite, paints him as a fanatic Chalcedonian who entangled many of the Monophysites "in his own heresy". *Chronique* II, 492.

25 He had Cosmas, the Cilician monk, freed whom he made teacher of his son John and his adopted son, called also Cosmas, the later hymnographer and bishop of Maiuma. M. Cordillo, "Vita Marciana", *Orientalia Christiana* 8 (1926) p. 64. The year of Cosmas' emancipation is significant in determining the date of birth and the age of John of Damascus.

26 The Greek sources seem to give credit to the Muslims for not forcing the Christians of Damascus to convert to Islam. Cf. Gordillo, *op. cit.*, p. 63. The information of the anonymous *Vita* that John pleaded with his father to allow Cosmas to become his tutor so that he may learn from him "not only the books of the Saracens, but those of the Greeks as well" (Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta*, IV, 273), is of particular significance in this context, if we were only able to define specifically these "Saracen books". If we were to accept Nasrallah's suggestion that John and Yazid were educated together (*op. cit.*, pp. 62ff), these books could have been the Qur'ān, Hadith stories and Arabic poetry.

27 For the Syriac literature in the early (up to the eighth century) and middle (up to the thirteenth century) period, see R.Y. Ebied, "The Syrian impact on Arabic Literature", in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period. The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, eds. A.F.L. Beeston *et al.*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 497–501.

28 Constantine Acropolites, *Sermo*, PG 140:829.

29 PG 94:941–4.

30 Ebied, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

the Christian community and facilitated the Muslim conquest of Syria, the reaffirmation of the Byzantine Orthodoxy represented for others, like John of Damascus, a conscientious effort at retaining what could be retained and securing a continuation and an affinity with the Byzantine tradition in a Muslim occupied Syria. No wonder, therefore, that John of Damascus in his writings makes Muhammad, pointedly, a student of Arian and Nestorian monks – thus distinguishing Orthodox Christianity from Arianism, Nestorianism, and from the “heresy” of Islam, as well.

## 2 Life in the Umayyad Court

John of Damascus did not see the city of his birth capitulating (August–September 636)<sup>31</sup> to the troops of Khalid b. al-Walid; an event in which his grand-father had played some significant but unidentified role.<sup>32</sup> He must have been a young person, however, when the Muslim fleet laid siege to Constantinople (674), and when Yazid I became caliph (680); the same year when the battle of Kerbala, the death of Husain, and the consolidation of the Shi‘at ‘Alī took place. These must have been crucial moments in the life of a Christian in the court of the Umayyads. His father served until well into the middle or the end of the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705).<sup>33</sup> He was succeeded by his son John. John of Damascus’ term of service lasted for some twenty years. The Greek sources point to his retirement at Mar Sabbas on or before 726, when Emperor Leo III (717–741) issued his edict against the

31 See Donner’s reconstruction of chronology in *Conquests*, pp. 132, 137 and 141.

32 The discrepancy between Eutychius, the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria (d. 940), and al-Baladhūri (d. 892) is significant. Eutychius (*Annales*, II, p. 15) makes him a “governor” who negotiated the terms of the capitulation and, actually, the person who opened the gates of Damascus. Al-Baladhūri (if he is speaking of Mansūr b. Sargūn) makes him only a “friend of the bishop” who surrendered the city. *Al-Buldān*, tr. P.K. Hitti, pp. 172, 187. Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 17ff. Eutychius also makes the negotiator pleading for his life, the life of his family, friends and the inhabitants of Damascus, “except the *Rūm*”, i.e. the Byzantines. *Annales*, II, p. 15. Both pieces of information from Eutychius betray his negative disposition towards the Mansūr family; possibly a Byzantine hindsight. The details of the conquest of Damascus are not fully synchronized among the various Arabic and non-Arabic sources. Cf. Donner, *Conquests*, pp. 140ff.

33 Theophanes places the agreement between Mansūr and ‘Abd al-Malik regarding the columns of the mosque of Mecca in the year 691 (*terminus ante quem*). Emperor Justinian, who was to provide these columns, died in 695 (*terminus post quem*). Cf. above, n. 25. Therefore, the tenure of Mansūr’s service in the caliphate may not have lasted much longer after the incident, as there is no further mention of his name in the sources.

icons, and when John of Damascus wrote the *Orationes* in their defence.<sup>34</sup> Contextual circumstances, which include the Arabization of the Umayyad court and reforms made in the taxation system under ‘Umar II, suggest a fairly early date of John of Damascus’ departure from the Umayyad court during ‘Umar’s Caliphate (717–720).<sup>35</sup> The Arabic sources make the Arabization and Islamization of the caliphate responsible for the dwindling Christian presence in the Umayyad court, while the Greek sources make iconoclasm responsible for the growing enmity between the iconoclast Byzantine Emperor and such defenders of the icons as John of Damascus. It is difficult for one to imagine that John of Damascus would have been able to function as a rival to the Byzantine Emperor and as a Christian public defender of the icons from the Umayyad court at the same time, if one would consider that ‘Abd al-Malik had already ordered new coins to be minted bearing no images, but only inscriptions from the Qur’ān on them. The Islamization of Damascus and of the Eastern Byzantine provinces on the one hand, and the iconoclastic upheaval in Constantinople on the other, must have been seen by John of Damascus, as they were seen by the pro-Byzantine Chalcedonians, as *apocalyptic* moments.<sup>36</sup> He calls Islam “the religion<sup>37</sup> of the Ishmaelites [the descendants of the illegitimate son of Abraham], the forerunner of the Antichrist”,<sup>38</sup> but he rebels with an equal vehemence against the iconoclast Emperor as he sees the Church,

34 On the question of Leo’s edicts against the icons, see Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos. Sources in Eighth Century Iconoclasm* [Toronto, (1986), 1988], p. 25.

35 This point is in deference to what I have suggested in *John of Damascus*, p. 44, n.2.

36 A growing interest in Christian sources contemporary to the conquests of Islam with a special focus on the “apocalyptic” character of these events has been noticed in recent years. Cf. Harald Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyphtik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main/Bern, 1985), and four important Syriac apocalyptic texts. F.J. Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius”, Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C. 1985). See also review and critical remarks on Suermann by S.P. Brock in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 44 (1987), pp. 813–6. Brock reports that yet another translation of the famous Apocalypse of Methodius is in preparation by G.J. Reinik for the series *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Ibid.*, p. 814. This kind of apocalyptic sentiment is found expressed mostly by pro-Byzantine Chalcedonians, rather than by Nestorian or Jacobite writers. Brock, p. 815.

37 Prior to Kotter’s critical edition the text was reading “σκεία”, either as an incomplete reading of the w. θρησκεία (religion), or as a distortion of the w. σκιά (darkness).

38 Kotter, iv, 60. Peter, bishop of Maiumā, had called not Islam but Muhammad himself “a false prophet” and “the forerunner of the Antichrist”, and for this blasphemy he paid with his life (743). Theophanes, *Chronographia* p. 642. Blasphemy became a legal point in Islam with specific definitions regarding circumstances, manners and intention. While, however, expressing one’s own critical views on Islam as a religion was not considered a blasphemy, dishonouring a prophet was.

“which God has built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, whose cornerstone is Christ, His Son, attacked by successive waves in a sea storm that has reached its climax”.<sup>39</sup> Islam and Iconoclasm, therefore, were viewed by contemporary Christians as two similar forces, ushering an apocalyptic era of battle between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. His decision to devote himself to the strict monastic life at Mar Sabbas and to the kind of rigorous writing that he did, reveals a radical reorientation in his life in rethinking of the future of Byzantium as an ideal Christian society.

It is unfortunate that we do not have, from his own hands, any historical writing telling us something of his own interpretation of the events. Muslim historians were, understandably, more interested in recording their conquests than the Christians. The conquests were shown by Muslims as the fulfilment of the expectations which their sources were promising. Oral traditions in full circulation at the time of John of Damascus were outspoken and colourful of Muhammad’s promise of a final victory of Islam.<sup>40</sup> Most of those promises had by now been fulfilled and were used as a proof of more things to come. But even if no further expansions were to take place, the conquest of Damascus and the whole of Syria was the most coveted one, and the one which the Muslims would be utterly unwilling to relinquish.<sup>41</sup>

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39 Kotter, III, 65. Theophanes also, a staunch defender of the icons, calls both iconoclastic Emperors, Leo III and his son Constantine V (741–775), “forerunners of the Antichrist.” *Chronographia*, pp. 627 and 414f. The expressions “Antichrist” and “forerunner of the Antichrist” had been used before by John of Damascus for Nestorius, and even earlier by Athanasius for the Arians.

40 “Such traditions promise Muhammad’s followers the conquest of Syria and the treasures of the Byzantines and the Persians. ‘I have been given the keys of Syria’ he is quoted as saying, as well as those of ‘Persia and Yemen’. On other occasions, Muhammad is quoted as giving further and more explicit promises that his followers will eventually inherit the wealth of the Byzantines and the Persians. Further traditions predict the conquests of Jerusalem by the Muslims, speak of Damascus as a future Muslim stronghold, and of a Muslim-Byzantine truce”. Ahmad M.H. Shboul, “Byzantium and the Arabs: The Image of the Byzantines as Mirrored in Arabic Literature”, in *Byzantine Papers. Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference*, eds. Elizabeth and Michael Jeffreys and Ann Moffatt (Australian Association for Byzantine Studies. Canberra, 1981), pp. 43–68, at 49 and corresponding notes for extensive references.

41 Only Arabia itself, with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina, seems to have been of greater importance to the Muslims. The reasons included old commercial contacts between Arabians and Syrians even before Islam; the first-hand knowledge which especially the Quraish Arabs had of Syria (some of them, like Abu Sufyān, owned even land near Damascus before Islam); an economic attraction of Syria; religious-cultic reasons, Jerusalem being a Syrian city; as well as other political and strategic reasons. Cf. Donner, *Conquests*, pp. 96ff.



There are no signs of despair, however, in the writings of John of Damascus. There are, instead, signs of a conscientious effort aiming at achieving two immediate, cardinal and practical goals and needs: the systematization and summary articulation of the Biblical and Patristic teaching,<sup>42</sup> and the refinement and enrichment of the spiritual and of the liturgical life of the Church. He achieved the first of these goals with the composition of the *Fountain of Knowledge*, the first comprehensive and systematic compendium of the Orthodox doctrine, preceded by two introductory sections, the “Philosophical chapters” explaining the meaning of the key philosophical and theological categories used in the Orthodox theology, and the section “On the heresies” naming the various heresies and outlining their heretical teaching. This first *Summa Theologica* was meant to be a manual of Orthodox theology for the ecclesiastics who were now left to carry on the legacy of Byzantine Christianity, even in Muslim occupied territories! The work is addressed to his adopted brother Cosmas, bishop of Maiuma. He achieved the second goal, with an articulate theological defence of the icons and with the development of new forms of hymnology (the canons on the major holidays of the Church) enriched with a profound doctrinal content.<sup>43</sup> The fact that two other major Orthodox hymnographers, Andreas the hymnographer who was born in Damascus and became Archbishop of Crete (711–740), and Cosmas the Melode, John’s own adopted brother, who was also born in Damascus,<sup>44</sup> are contemporary to John of Damascus and related to Damascus and to this liturgical and hymnographic renewal, shows a common tradition and a common understanding of the times: if the Muslims were going to allow the Christians freedom of worship, then that which was needed to be renewed and fortified was worship; indeed, a prophetic response to history.

John of Damascus’ withdrawal to Mar Sabbas, a centre of literary activity and of liturgical renewal in the seventh and eighth centuries,<sup>45</sup> was not an escape, but a retreat to salvage what could be salvaged of the tradition and spirituality of a Christian Empire becoming subjugated to Islam and

42 Thence, John of Damascus’ introductory affirmation “ἐρῶ δὲ ἐμὸν οὐδέν”. Cf. the entire *Prooimion* – Letter to Cosmas of Maiuma. PG 94:524–5; Kotter, I, 52–3.

43 Cf. P. Trempelas, *Ἐκλογή Ἑλληνικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἰμνογραφίας* (Athens, 1949), *in passim*. Cf. also K. Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ἰμνογραφία. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης ἕως τὴν Εἰκονομαχία*, (Athens, 1986).

44 Théocharis Detorakis [“Vie inédite de Cosmas”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 99 (1981), pp. 101–116] has shown that Cosmas was from Damascus and not from Jerusalem, as the reference to him as Ἀγιοπολίτης (= of, or from, the Holy City, i.e. Jerusalem) has led some to believe.

45 For the significance of Mar Sabbas Monastery, see Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem. Vie monastique et confession dogmatique* (Paris, 1972), pp. 25–44.

declining theologically; at least this was the impression that one could naturally gain if residing in Damascus. Caliph Hisham (724–43) had the crowned heads of the world, the Byzantine Caesar, the Persian Shah, the Abyssinian Negus, Roderick the last Visigothic King of Spain, and two other figures, probably the emperor of China and a Turkish or Indian monarch, painted at Qusayr Amrah, paying fealty to the Arab ruler. Nearby stands the symbolic figure of victory, for all these mighty rulers had been bested in battle by the early Umayyads. The painting may reflect the admiration of the Umayyads for things Greek, and the Kings may be shown “not merely as subordinates, but as colleagues”, but the fundamental intention of subjugation and subordination cannot be concealed.<sup>46</sup>

### 3 Treatment of Islam

We cannot underestimate the profound influence that a first-hand experience of Islam on the human level had upon John of Damascus. We can discern this in the kind of inside information, in the detailed account of his descriptions, and in his awareness of the essentials of Islam. At a time, even today, when people refer to Islam as “Mohammedanism”, to a mosque as an Islamic “church” and to an imam as a “Muslim priest”, or Byzantine controversialists like the tenth-century intellectual ecclesiastic Arethas of Caesarea and others before him made the most platitudinous, inaccurate and inflammatory statements, John of Damascus’ factual treatment of Islam, use of terminology and of references to Islamic sources is, indeed, impressive.<sup>47</sup> He gives direct references to four specific surahs of the Qur’ān by title, and he alludes to many more. Whether he had read the entire Qur’ān or he had it in front of him when he was writing his treatise, is difficult to prove. However, many of the expressions and references he used can be traced to many references in the Qur’ān itself.<sup>48</sup> He is, perhaps, the first known non-Muslim writer who refers to surahs

46 L.E. Goodman, “The Greek impact on Arabic literature”, in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* ed. A.F.L. Beeston, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 473. Cf. also P. Baker, “The Frescoes of Amra”, *ARAMCO Magazine* 31 (J-A, 1980), pp. 22–25.

47 Cf. also R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962), p. 46.

48 Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, ch. Five *in passim*. For example, he refers to the Qur’ān as γράφη, as the Qur’ān states of itself (19:16, 41, 51, 54); that it was “sent down” upon Muhammad, an expression found more than eighteen times in the Qur’ān (Cf. Sahas, p. 74, n. 5); to the requirement of having witnesses for getting married and for other occasions (2:282f; 4:6, 15, 41; 5:106f; 24:4ff, 13; 65:2); that the Jews also are “associators” (9:30); that Jews and Christians have concealed Scriptures given to them (19:58–9, 2:146, 3:71); on

by title, and thus a source of information of their early existence.<sup>49</sup> Muslim practices which he knew by personal observation, he describes accurately. In contrast, and with reference to the *hajj* to which, of course, John of Damascus had no direct access and for which he must have depended upon circum-spect, popular and pietistic accounts, his descriptions are populist and sound derogatory and controversial.<sup>50</sup> In the end, he produced a brief but systematic summary and refutation, with reference to history, doctrine, scriptures, ethics and practices of Islam. Chapter 100/1 of the *De Haeresibus* is written in a language and style to be used as an easy reference by its Christian readers.<sup>51</sup> John of Damascus continues the tradition of Justin, the second-century Christian apologist, philosopher and martyr: as long as Islam speaks of God, God's word, and human conduct, it might have something to say to Christians, even if "heretical".<sup>52</sup> Time, and time of revelation, seems to be the popular but firm criterion of truth in the monotheistic traditions. Christianity saw itself as the fulfilment of Judaism, and Islam as the fulfilment and restoration of true

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paradise; Muslim practices, such as circumcision, abolition of the Sabbath, dietary laws, prohibition of wine, topics on which Qur'anic references can be found in abundance.

- 49 Cf. "al-Kur'ān", *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 282. John of Damascus identifies by name four surahs: S.4, "The Woman" (*al-Nisā*); references to "The she-camel of God" from S.7:73–9 and 26:141–59 and the story of Sālih, the prophet of the people of Thāmuḍ (in various passages of the Qur'ān); S.5 "The Table [Spread]" (*al-Mā'idah*); S.2 "The Heifer" (*al-Barāqah*). But he alludes also to "many" others, which he finds appropriate "to pass by". Kotter, IV, 67:53. To what extent also one can establish some correlation between the ἀκροστυχίς (acrostic) of John of Damascus' canons and the "mysterious letters" of the Qur'ān, is an intriguing and open question.
- 50 Did Umayyad officials use to participate in the *hajj*? It seems unlikely. With the tensions between themselves and the Shi'a, and especially with their fascination of Damascus and its cosmopolitan life, the pilgrimage must have lost its attraction among the newly sophisticated, luxury loving officials of Damascus. No wonder that ascetic Sufism arose during this period of history. John of Damascus must have relied on descriptions of active participants in the *hajj* in order to write, for example, that the Muslims "rub themselves on a stone" and they "kiss the stone" [Kotter, IV, p.64]. Also, he is alluding probably to the exclamation "[Allāhu] akbar" when he refers to the stone as "Khabar." Kotter IV, 60:8 and 64:80. Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 86–7.
- 51 Strangely enough, contemporary Byzantines did not care to read about Islam, especially from accounts coming from the occupied Syria and from a writer whom his opponents in Byzantium including two Emperors, Leo III (717–741), and his son Constantine V (741–775), had branded as "bastard", "Saracen-minded," and "conspirator against the Empire." Cf. Mansi, 13:352E–356D. Cf. also Sahas, "John of Damascus," in *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984–1985), pp. 104–118, at 105. Not so with the subsequent Orthodox Byzantines and Western Christian writers, who wanted to be informed about Islam. They studied what John of Damascus had to say and they copied him, even verbatim.
- 52 Cf. in the *Prooimion* of the *Capita Philosophica* his attitude toward Greek philosophy. PG 94:524; Kotter, I, 52.

Judaism and of true Christianity. Justin the martyr with his notion of the “σπερματικός λόγος” (spermatic, or seminal, word) broke the cycle of time, and made divine wisdom the criterion of truth, independently of geography, culture and time. Inherently, this is what John of Damascus did, as well. That is why, questions of sophistry, such as whether Muhammad’s advent was preannounced by previous prophets, or whether Muhammad performed more and superior miracles than Jesus and Moses, or whether the literary style of the Qur’ān is a proof of Muhammad’s prophethood, do not enter his refutation of Islam. It must be said, however, that the main interest of John of Damascus is Christianity and its Orthodox theology, not Islam. His treatment of Islam, although not abstract and detached, is not a treatise on its own, but a unit within a broader book of heresies which, in turn, is part of an even lengthier, comprehensive dogmatic-apologetic, work. Thus, Islam holds a minuscule part in John of Damascus’ literary work. For John of Damascus, Islam on the one hand, and iconoclasm on the other, are two contemporary Christological heresies, both of which claim an alternative relationship with, and a different form of worship of God from that of Orthodox Christianity. In fact, the main emphasis of chapter 100/1 is on the person and the prophethood of Muhammad, and on the person of Christ.<sup>53</sup> He calls Islam (not Muhammad himself) “forerunner of the Antichrist,” a name which he used also for Nestorius,<sup>54</sup> and makes Muhammad a disciple of Arians and Nestorians for treating Christ as a creature and a mere human being.<sup>55</sup>

The most comprehensive thesis against the authenticity of chapter 101 of the *De Haeresibus* has been advanced by A. Abel.<sup>56</sup> The thrust of Abel’s thesis is that this text is too mature for such an early time as that of John of Damascus! Abel places the text in the tenth century. We have always maintained that the text is authentic, and its critical edition<sup>57</sup> has vindicated our position. Therefore, Abel’s own thesis is a testimony to John of Damascus’ advanced quality of the treatment of Islam at such an early stage of its appearance. In fact, one may suggest that John of Damascus’ systematic work might have

53 The person of Christ, although under the disguise of a discussion on the attributes of God and their relationship to his essence, constitutes a major theme also in the *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani*; Kotter, IV, pp. 427–38.

54 PG 94:1032A. In 94:1216 he gives a definition of Antichrist as the one who denies the incarnation of the Son of God, his perfect divinity and his perfect humanity.

55 Kotter, IV, 60. The Paris gr. 1320 codex s.11 includes Jews, Arians and Nestorians among those who influenced Muhammad.

56 “Le chapitre C1 du *Livre des Hérésies* de Jean Damascène: son inauthenticité”, *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963), 5–25. For an analysis of Abel’s theses, cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 61–6.

57 Cf. Kotter, IV, pp. 60–7.

inspired the early Muslim *mutakallim* to develop their own heresiography and systematic theology.<sup>58</sup>

The length and the content of Chapter 100/1, in comparison to other chapters in the *De Haeresibus*, speak of the amount of his personal knowledge and of the weight he gives to this newest “heresy” of Arab origin. Here are the main points of his description of Islam:

1. He relates Islam to Abraham, Ishmael and Hagar, which is essential and, for a Muslim, an honourable beginning for the understanding of the claim of Islam as the purest form of monotheism.<sup>59</sup> Hisham Ibn al-Kalbi (d.821/2) vindicates Islam as a return to pure monotheism and to the religion of Abraham.<sup>60</sup> John of Damascus’ account of the *jahiliyyah* is almost identical to that of Ibn al-Kalbi, who derived his information from his father, Muhammad b. al-Said al-Kalbi (d. 763), a contemporary to John of Damascus.<sup>61</sup> Both present *jahiliyyah* as the Abrahamic tradition which, however, deteriorated into a crude polytheism and litholatry.
2. He attempts to discredit Islam as the authentic religion of Abraham by ingeniously calling its followers “Sarracens.” John of Damascus is, perhaps, the first Byzantine author who introduced this etymological distortion for polemic and mnemonic purposes.<sup>62</sup> He also characterizes the Muslims by the Greek name Κόπται (“Mutilators”) for stripping God of His Word and Spirit, thus counteracting the Muslim accusation that the

58 John of Damascus’ *Fount of Knowledge* has been compared in structure to al-Ash’arī’s (873–935) compendium of Sunnism, *Makālāt al-islāmīyyīn*: a) a survey of the Muslim sects; b) the creed of the orthodox community; c) a survey of the different opinions on the concepts of *kalam*. Cf. “Al-Ash’arī” in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramer (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), p.46; M.M. Sharif ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 223. On the structure of the *Fount of Knowledge*, cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 51–60.

59 Cf. Kotter, IV, 60, 64. Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 89.

60 *Kitāb al-Asnām (The Book of Idols)*, tr. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton, 1952); and S. 2:127, 133, 135; 14:40.

61 *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, ed. and tr. by Bayard Dodge (N. York, vol.1, 1970), pp. 206–216; Ibn al-Kalbi, *Kitāb al-Asnam*, pp. 4ff; 28f. The name Ibn al-Kalbi betrays, perhaps, the tribal origin of his family, which is likely the same as that of the family of John of Damascus. Thus, John of Damascus’ awareness of the period of the *jahiliyyah* has its source in the oral traditions of the Banū Kalb through such transmitters as Ibn al-Kalbi’s father.

62 V. Christides is erroneously suggesting that the fifteenth-century George Phrantzes was the first Byzantine to give the name “Saracen” the etymological twist to mean “those who have been sent away (without grace) by Sarah.” “The names Ἀραβες, Σαρακηνοί etc., and their false byzantine etymologies”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65(1972)329–333. Giving a pointed etymology to names is not something unknown in polemic or apologetic literature. John of Damascus proves himself to be a masterful name-fabricator.

Christians are “Ἐταιριασταί” (“Associators”, or *mushrikūn*) because of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>63</sup>

3. He depicts Muhammad as an Arian heretic with only a cursory knowledge of the Old and the New Testament.<sup>64</sup> Notwithstanding the general perception of Islam as a religion influenced by Nestorianism, the restored text makes John of Damascus more perceptive of the essence of Islam with reference to Christ. As Arianism denies the co-eternity of the Son and, thus, his consubstantiality to the Father, it is this *Arian* teaching rather that makes Islam and Christianity essentially different from each other. The Christian assertion of the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father (“begotten, not made”) makes Christ “Lord”, as well as the means “through whom all things were made”, in the words of the Nicene Creed. Islam strives to maintain the absolute unity of God, and the Qurʾān wants Christ to be, instead, a “servant”<sup>65</sup> and a creature, made as Adam was made.<sup>66</sup> Thus, “createdness”<sup>67</sup> and “submission”<sup>68</sup> are at the heart of both the Arian and the Islamic Christology. First, Arius addressed the question of the co-eternity and, consequently, of the *essence* of the Son in relationship to the Father. Nestorius then dealt with the question of the *relationship of the natures*, human and divine, in Christ. The difference between the two teachings is significant. One may say that behind the Qurʾānic Christ there is Arianism with its created Word of God teaching, while behind the Muslim theological controversy over the doctrine of the Qurʾān as the Word of God, is Nestorianism. A variant text supports this conclusion when it states that Muhammad received “from Arianism (the doctrine) that the Word and Spirit are creatures, and from Nestorianism the worship of a (mere) man.”<sup>69</sup>

63 Kotter, IV, pp. 63–64. *Κόπται* carries the same connotation as the Arabic term *taʿtil*, which was applied to the Muʿtazilites by their opponents to indicate that, by denying the reality of attributes, they have emptied or divested God of attributes. Kramer has suggested that the word *taʿtil* is equivalent to the Christian *κένωσις* as in Phl. 2:7. H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 62. John of Damascus might have provided the opponents of the Muʿtazilites with a perfect idea for an appropriate name for them!

64 Kotter, IV, 60.

65 Q 4:72, 43:59.

66 Q 3:59.

67 The equivalent expression is Arius’ characteristic statement that “there was a time when (the Son) was not”, and even the use by him of the exact same word “created.” Cf. Mansi, 11:665, 887, 880, 916.

68 Arius following his teacher, Lucian, would call this “subordination”, after Origen.

69 The belief in Christ as the consubstantial Son of God the Father in Christianity, and the acceptance of the Qurʾān in Islam as the actual Word of God, are equivalent. On the well-established phenomenological affinity between Christ and the Qurʾān see S. Hossein Nasr,

4. He presents accurately the fundamental faith of Islam in the unity of God by quoting, actually, verses from *Sūrat al-Tawhīd*,<sup>70</sup> which witnesses to God as Creator, and by referring to the frequent Qur'ānic expressions of God having no partner.<sup>71</sup>
5. A significant portion of the chapter is taken by the exposition of the Islamic Christology. What John of Damascus reports about Christ in Islam is accurate, comprehensive and can be traced directly to the Qur'ān.<sup>72</sup>
6. He questions the truthfulness of Muhammad's call to prophethood with no outside witness, except his own claim that he received the Qur'ān while asleep.<sup>73</sup> Thus, John of Damascus treats the Qur'ān as a product of reverie, and presents Muhammad as a misguided individual.
7. Regarding matters of practice and conduct, John of Damascus refutes the Muslim perception that the Christians are idolaters for honouring the cross (an accusation which the iconoclasts also had levelled against the iconophile Christians) and, once again, he reverses the accusation by reminding that the Muslims kiss and embrace the black stone in the Ka'ba. He criticizes polygamy and the procedures of marriage and

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*Ideals and Realities of Islam* [Boston (1964) 1972], p. 43 and in passim; and Daniel J. Sahas "The Christological Morphology of the Doctrine of the Qur'ān" in *Pluralism, Tolerance and Dialogue: Six Studies*, ed. by M. Darrol Bryant (Waterloo, Ont. 1989), pp. 77–98 (see Chapter 3 in this volume).

70 Q 112:1, 3; Kotter IV, 61.

71 Q 96:1, 19:88–93; 18:13; 2:116; 19:35; 39:3–4; 4:48, 116; 5:72; 28:68; 30:35.

72 Word of God, 3:39, 45; 4:171; 2:87. Spirit of God, 4:171. Created, 3:59. Servant of God, 4:172; 19:30, 93; 43:59. Born of Mary, 2:87, 253; 3:45; 4:157, 171; 5:46; 75, 110, 112, 114, 116; 43:57, 19:34; 33:7; 57:27; 61:6, 14. Mary, sister of Moses 19:28 as the Damascene puts it. [Parenthetically, the question of Mary being sister of Aaron and thus of Moses as well, as in 19:28, or "the wife of 'Imrān" the father of Moses, as is in 3:35, has been criticised by non-Muslim scholars, like Muir, as a crude anachronism to which Muslims have responded that the name of Jesus' grandfather was also 'Imrān which may also have been the name of the father of Moses! Cf. M.M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York, n.d.), p. 61]. Born without seed, 3:47; 19:19–22; 21:91; 4:169. The Word of God entered Mary, 4:171, 19:17; 21:91; 66:12. Jesus, a prophet 3:39, 79; 4:171; 5:75; 19:30; 33:7. The Jews wanted to crucify him, 3:54. They crucified his shadow, 4:157, 2:73. He did not die on the cross, 4:157. God took him up to Himself, 3:55; 4:158. Jesus denied his divinity, 5:116; 3:55f; 5:17, 72; 4:171; 9:30, 31; 19:35, 90–3; 39:4.

73 Later polemicists expanded the criteria for accepting the prophethood of Muhammad, to include his pre-announcement by previous prophets, and the performance of miracles as signs and proofs of his reliability. However, at the time of John of Damascus, the question of proof of the prophethood of Muhammad had not yet been sharpened by either side. On the question of miracles of Muhammad, see Daniel J. Sahas, "The Formation of later Islamic doctrines as a response to Byzantine polemics: The Miracles of Muhammad," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), 307–324 (see Chapter 4 in this volume).

divorce, by referring appropriately to the Surah “Women”<sup>74</sup> and to Zaid’s divorce. In general, he criticizes sharply what he sees as a licentious treatment of women by the Muslims, and he quotes the characteristic passage from the Qur’ān, “Your women are tilth for you; so go to your tilth as ye will, ...”<sup>75</sup>

8. In less than four lines, at the end, he lists the main practices and prohibitions of Islam: circumcision; abolition of the Sabbath and baptism; change in the dietary laws, and prohibition of drinking wine.<sup>76</sup>

Supplementary to this general review of Islam as a system of faith and practice, is the *Disputatio* between a Saracen and a Christian; a dialectic exchange over theological and philosophical questions. In the topics and the order of this debate one can discern the evolution of the politico-ideological situations within the Muslim community, which gave rise to theological debates over such matters as faith and works (the Kharijite-Murji’ite debate); man’s power, freedom of will and predestination (the Jabrite-Qadarite-Mu’tazilite debate); the authority and essence of the Qur’ān as the Word of God (the Sunni-Jahmite debate); and the divine attributes and their relationship to the essence of God. Thus, the *Disputatio* is a reflection (and a summary report from the Christian side) of the theological questions which were under debate within the Muslim community at the time of John of Damascus; and a valuable source of information at that. The *Disputatio* is a Christian response to theological and philosophical questions raised in some hypothetical or actual dialogues with Muslims.

Three topics dominate the *Disputatio*, treated also as issues of Christian theology.

Firstly, man’s power and freedom of will. Albeit that God is the sole creator of everything, man has power and, thus, ultimate responsibility in choosing between good or evil. This is a central theme also in his *Fount of Knowledge*.<sup>77</sup> Whether John of Damascus influenced the Qadariyya movement directly on this topic, is difficult to prove. It is only worth mentioning that Hasan al-Basrī (d. 728), the alleged father of the movement, was a contemporary to John of Damascus, and an ascetic as well. For Hasan al-Basrī God’s “determination” is God’s “command” for man to do certain things and to avoid others. As an ascetic, Hasan al-Basrī insisted on the value of self-discipline; thus, allowing man to have the power and the will to avoid what is contrary to the will of

74 He calls this surah, that “of the Woman”. S. 2:229–230.

75 Q 2:223. For a most interesting discussion of sexuality from an Islamic perspective, see Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London, 1985).

76 Kotter, IV, 67.

77 Specifically in the *De Fide Orthodoxa* (Kotter, II), chapters 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 92, 93, 94, 95 and *in passim*.



God.<sup>78</sup> For John of Damascus, as for Hasan al-Basrī, the question is not whether man has freedom of *will*, but rather whether man has authority (ἀυτεξούσιον) of his own, or power (*qadar*) over his actions. John of Damascus is also contemporary to Wāsil b. ‘Atā’ (d. 749), from the circle of Hasan al-Basrī, and of ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 762), both of whom are considered to be the pioneers of the Mu‘tazila movement, or “the people of Unity and Justice” who supported the Qadarite teaching because of their insistence on the justice of God.

Secondly, the question of the nature of the Qur‘ān. The opposition to the Sunni faith, (that the Qur‘ān is the “uncreated speech of God” – an equivalent to the Monophysite doctrine about Christ), came from Jahm b. Safwān (d. 746), coincidentally another contemporary to John of Damascus, although an improbable student of his!<sup>79</sup> That which, according to John of Damascus, makes God’s attributes infinite expressions rather than created parts of God’s essence is the infinity of the Godhead himself;<sup>80</sup> that “unbegottedness” which *surat al-Tawhīd* ascribes to God, and which Islam does not allow to be seen as a distinct, personal, quality. The question of anthropomorphism, which was raised as an original objection by the Mu‘tazilites regarding the tension between the uncreated Qur‘ān and its anthropomorphic language, is dealt with by John of Damascus as simply a “typological” feature of the Scriptures. The same objection has an early precedent in Christianity in the person of Origen and the Anthropomorphites of the Egyptian desert.<sup>81</sup> The distinction made in the *Disputatio* between “word” or “speech” (λόγος), and “utterance” or “words” (λόγια) is the philosophical seed which John of Damascus planted in the debate between Sunnis and Jahmites, which was progressively refined by the Asharite synthesis; that the speech of God is uncreated, while the utterance of the Qur‘ān is created.

78 Cf. W.M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1964), pp. 31–2. For John of Damascus, God’s foreknowledge does not imply activity or imposition of his divine will upon man. The will of God is foreknown to him but not compulsory upon man. John of Damascus teaches, for example, that Mary was predestined by the foreknown will of God (προορισθείσα προγνωστικῆ βουλῆ), but not compelled by it. Cf. PG 94:1156A; 96:672E, 701E. Cf. C. Chevalier, *La Mariologie de Saint Jean Damascène*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta # 109 (Roma, 1936), p. 45.

79 Cf. above #3.

80 For the influence of John of Damascus on Western Christian theologians on this topic, cf. Diane E. Dubrulle, “Gerard of Abbeville, ‘Quod libet’ XIII, Question 10,” *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970), pp. 128–137, at 133.

81 Cf. Georges Florovsky, “The Anthropomorphites in the Egyptian Desert. Part I”, and “Theophilus of Alexandria and Apa Aphou of Pemdje. The Anthropomorphites in the Egyptian Desert. Part II”, in his *Aspects of Church History*, Volume IV in his Collected Works (Belmont, Mass. 1975) pp. 89–96 and 97–129.

Thirdly, that the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father, and the essential affinity of the Qur'ān to God Himself, both affirm the finality of Christ and that of the Qur'ān, respectively. No wonder, therefore, that the last point of the *Disputatio* deals, in essence, with the debate over Christ or Islam as the ultimate and final stage of God's revelation.<sup>82</sup>

There is nothing strange in John of Damascus' train of thought which most Muslims would not be able to subscribe to and use in order to reinforce and articulate their own religious convictions. From John of Damascus' own account it becomes evident that the essential difference between Christianity and Islam is the mode of God's revelation: in Christianity as a *personal* act of God through the incarnation of His Logos, and in Islam as a revelation of His will through its utterance by human beings, the prophets. It is from these two essentially different modes of revelation that the worship, the ritual, the code of conduct and the religious expressions of each community derive and become distinct, and reciprocally "heretical", in the eyes of the believers of the other community. It is on the basis of Christ that for a Christian Islam becomes a heresy, as it is on the basis of the Qur'ān that for a Muslim Christianity becomes a heresy. However, revelation as such remains the central and essential bond between the two traditions.

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

It seems to me that it was John of Damascus' articulate presentation of Islam as a complete rational system of thought and praxis, albeit in a controversial and polemic manner, that made an impact upon the Muslims themselves. It was the excitement and the novelty of debating doctrine and practice in a philosophical manner, using Greek philosophical categories and logic (a novelty itself for the Muslims), that attracted them the most, even beyond the substance of the argument itself. The Greek "impact" upon Islam did not consist simply of "importing of Ionic rationalism into the context of 'semetic' monotheism".<sup>83</sup> It was rather that Greek synthesis in terms of thought and conduct which John of Damascus exemplified, that was admired and emulated by contemporary Muslims. While in subsequent centuries, when Islam was living its period of

82 Cf. Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 119–121.

83 "The Greeks themselves were not all rationalists every moment of the time. Greek spirituality, Greek morals, Greek views of revelation, Greek mysticism, had been interacting with Near Eastern notions of the same topics long before Islam appeared on the scene, and this impact upon Islam is manifold and complex". Goodman, *op. cit.* in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, p. 478.

Islamic Renaissance,<sup>84</sup> Byzantines do not feature well in the Arabic literature on matters of science and culture, in the earliest centuries John of Damascus seems to have been a prominent member of that generation of Christians who, in their effort to revitalize their own faith, inspired the Muslims to study Islam for themselves by using the models and the achievements of outside knowledge to this end.

Although John of Damascus did not write a book on asceticism equivalent to *Kitāb al-Zuhd* ("Book of Asceticism") of his contemporary Asad b. Mūsa (d. 749), he exemplified the ascetic ideals with his own life. His example and that of the contemporary Christian mystics were an open book for the Muslims to contemplate upon and act accordingly.

His *Fount of Knowledge* might have provided the blue print for al-Ash'ari's, Ibn Hazm's and al-Shahraṣṭāni's heresiographical works. The resilience of the Islamic community and its ability to absorb a variety of polarized movements and trends of thought, allowed Islam to balance conflicting ideologies and doctrines and to arrive at its own classical Orthodoxy. The passion for "Orthodoxy", or a "balanced" faith that inclines neither to the right nor to the left, which for Christianity became a central issue during the period of the iconoclastic controversies, finds an equivalent tendency in the "position between two positions" (*al-manzila bayna l-manzilatayn*,) of Wāsil b. 'Atā' (d. 748) and the Mu'tazilite movement. The time of John of Damascus is a time of defining "Orthodoxy". In Christianity this balancing was determined to be made between populist superstition on the one hand, and Origenistic abstraction or dilution of religious experience on the other; between abstract faith and expression; between worship and veneration; between reality and Docetism in God's revelation. In Islam the balancing was to be made between faith and works; absolute divine determinism and human authority; identification of the Book with God's word itself, or its total alienation from the realm of the divine.

John of Damascus seems to have made an impact on the Muslim intellectual life neither, of course, because he was a Christian, nor because of what he wrote critically about Islam, but primarily because he was an enlightened Arab. For the Muslims, John of Damascus was a familiar face and a congenial thinker. One can never underestimate the Semitic ancestry and the Syrian culture of John of Damascus as the most significant factors in his encounter and relation with Islam. One also should not be misled by the fact that he wrote all his works in Greek, and overlook his Semitic culture and frame of mind which

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84 Cf. Shboul, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–8.

are at the root of his disposition and intellectual expression.<sup>85</sup> His Arab culture is reflected even in the iconography which depicts him wearing a turban.<sup>86</sup>

There seems to be a natural clinging between John of Damascus and the Arab Muslim thinkers. It is, perhaps, the common "Arab" frame of mind and ethos that makes them congenial in their general disposition. What, for example, the West took from John of Damascus as something unique, namely the ontological definition of man in terms of his divine creation, and his *natural* knowledge of God's existence,<sup>87</sup> Islam had already taken for granted as *fitr*, or man's naturally implanted knowledge of, and relationship with, God. Thus, both John of Damascus and the Muslims did not have to begin talking about God starting first from a rational proof of his existence. They could, instead, proceed with the question of *relationship* between man and God, and treat theology as a matter of *experience*. And while John of Damascus as a Christian saw and taught about this relationship in terms of divine adoption, imitation and *theosis*, the Muslims saw it and acted upon it in terms of submission. Thence, the centrality of the question of man's ἀντεξούσιον and *qadar* in John of Damascus and in Islam, respectively; not as a rational, but rather as an *ethical* question.<sup>88</sup> Eastern Christianity and early Islam have this essential characteristic in common: they treat religion as a matter of natural and profound affinity between man and the divine, and as a way of life.

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85 In the words of Donner, "the Hellenistic impact on Syria was always something imposed on Syria from above. Even after nearly ten centuries of exposure to Greek language and Graeco-Roman culture, the great mass of the Syrian populace remained thoroughly Semitic. Syrians never embraced the Greek tongue or Greek culture to the extent that some other groups – the diverse peoples of Asia Minor for example – certainly had"; *Conquests*, pp. 92–4. The writings of John of Damascus were translated extensively into Arabic. Cf. George Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Città del Vaticano, vol. 1, 1944), pp. 378–9; Aziz S. Atiya, "St. John Damascene: Survey of the Unpublished Arabic Versions of his Works in Sinai", in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honour of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi (Leiden, 1965), pp. 73–83. Some of these translations go back to the tenth century; another indication of his Arab lineage.

86 Cf. Cod. 380m, fol. 9v of the monastery of Xyropotamou; cod. 431, fol. 64v of the monastery of Dionysiou (*The Treasures of Mount Athos*, Athens, 1974, vol. 1, pp. 144 and 351, plates 166 and 456); and the fresco by Frankos Katelanos (1548) at the monastery of Barlaam, Meteora, Greece.

87 On John of Damascus' influence upon Thomas Aquinas and other Western Mediaeval theologians on the existence of God as self-evident (*sit per se notum*), see Anton Pegis, "St. Anselm and the Argument of the 'Proslogion'", *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1966), pp. 228–267, at 231, 233–4; also his, "The Bonaventure Way of God," *Mediaeval Studies* 29 (1967), pp. 206–242, at 215.

88 Consider the entire text of the *Disputatio*.

For the Muslims, John of Damascus as a man of faith, an enlightened individual, a priest and a monk, was a living example of a “Muslim”, in the true meaning of the word. The Qur’ān speaks of Christians “who are nearest in affection to those who believe” (i.e. to the Muslims) “because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud”.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, John of Damascus projects none of the ignorance, as well as of the arrogance and the militancy which come with it, which later Byzantine and Muslim polemicists demonstrated. For this, he earned the respect of his fellow Christians and of the Muslims alike.

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89 S. 5:82.



**PART 4**

*On or Off the Path of the Damascene*







## Bartholomeus of Edessa on Islam: A Polemicist with Nerve!

Among the many pieces of Byzantine anti-Islamic literature of varied texture and content<sup>1</sup> one is distinguished as particularly polemic. It has been preserved under the title “Ἐλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ” (*Confutatio Agareni*).<sup>2</sup> Another piece attributed to the same author, entitled “Κατὰ Μωάμεδ” (*Contra Muhammed*), and printed immediately after the first<sup>3</sup> does not seem to come from the same hand. The texts are also found in *The Bodleian No. 17066.188 ms.* a 15th c. ms, the “Κατὰ Μωάμεδ” in 6 1/2 folia (fol. 18<sup>r</sup>–24<sup>r</sup>) and the “Ἐλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ” in 34 folia (fol. 24<sup>r</sup>–61<sup>r</sup>). The *Confutation* ends with the line “End of the life of the impure Muhammad”,<sup>4</sup> while the *Against Muhammad* begins with an introductory and incomplete statement [“Against the Saracens who are called Ishmaelites deriving their origin from Ishmael” (1448B)] which might have been a title or a subtitle. One has the impression that the *Confutation* is a polemic piece against Muhammad, while the *Against Muhammad* is a refutation against Islam! In

1 “Byzantine anti-Islamic literature” is not a well-defined or codified field. By this name we do not mean every reference and any kind of literature which relates to Islam or to Muslims in *passim*, but rather a corpus (unfortunately not yet fully identified) which concentrates on Islam and treats it as a topic of its own, usually for apologetic, or polemic purposes. On this literature several general surveys and studies have appeared of which we mention selectively the following: W. Eichner, “Die Nachrichten über den Islam bei den Byzantinern”, *Der Islam* 23 (1936), pp. 133–162, 197–244; G.C. Anawati, “Islam et christianisme: La rencontre de deux cultures en Occident au moyen âge”, *Mélanges Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales du Caire* 20 (1991), 233–299. A.-T. Houry, *Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam. I. Textes et auteurs* (VII–XII s.) (Louvain, 1969); *Idem*, *Polémique Byzantine contre Islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Leiden, 1972); *Idem*, *Apologétique byzantine contre l’Islam (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.)* (Altenberge, 1982). The secondary literature on individual authors and writings is much more extensive.

2 PG 104: 1384–1448, a clearly *akephalon* text. Its beginning implies discussion on the Qur’an which has preceded (“Καὶ οὕτως εὐρον ταῦτα ἐν τῷ Κορανίῳ σου γεγραμμένα ...” 1384A, followed by “Καὶ ὅτι λέγεις ...” 1384A). This edition bears all the signs of a copyist, or copyists, with limited knowledge of Greek and of Islam, and of Roman Catholic inclinations. See e.g. the allusion to the Roman Catholic last rites (1385A). A more accurate edition with a German translation has been produced recently by K.-P. Todt, *Bartholomaios von Edessa. Confutatio Agareni. Kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe* (Würzburg: Telos-Verlag, 1988). In this study the references will be to the text in the *Patrologia Graeca* edition, except where the difference in the text is significant.

3 PG 104: 1448–57.

4 PG 104: 1448A.

this study we will confine ourselves to the first piece, the “Ἐλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ”, or *Confutatio Agareni*.

The treatise comes from an author who identifies himself with the words “monk Bartholomeus the Edessene, the most ignorant among the Christians and the least of all”.<sup>5</sup> One should recognize in these words a monastic cliché of humility, and not take it seriously by allowing oneself to bypass this text, less one will miss a most colourful, informative, interesting and insightful, albeit offensive,<sup>6</sup> vulgar and arrogant piece of Byzantine anti-Islamic literature. Even notoriously critical students of Byzantine anti-Islamic writers and of Bartholomeus in particular have found in Bartholomeus “une originalité ou plus exactement un caractère insolite qui lui confèrent un rang particulier dans la tradition polémique byzantine”; something which makes the *Confutation* a work “la plus remarquable”, “plein de nouveauté” and “plein aussi de problèmes”.<sup>7</sup> The ascetic author unabashedly claims that he had read all Muslim books, and that (by definition?) he and all Christians know everything about Muhammad and Islam, better than the Muslims themselves, because they have existed before Muhammad! Therefore, the Muslims ought to learn everything they do not know from the Christians who believe in the living and rational (λογικόν) God;<sup>8</sup> a transhistorical claim which has been proven fatal through the history of Christian-Muslim relations. This extraordinary statement is based, perhaps, on the concept and the inherent belief that the Christians, having come before the Muslims and having received the fullness of knowledge through Christ, the incarnate wisdom of God, possess all knowledge. We may have here echoes, albeit misunderstood and distorted, of Justin the philosopher’s *logos spermaticos*.

5 PG 104: 1385B.

6 Monastic vehemence and temperament may be attributed to the traditional impatience for, if not hatred towards, evil along with a passion for God. The nēptic Fathers expressed strong “emotions” for either God or evil. Against evil and the attachment to worldly things they used such words as “anger”, [Cf. St. Isaiah the Solitary, *Philokalia* trans. by G.E.H. Palmer et al., 1 (London, 1982), p. 22, # 1)], “hate” (*ibid.*, p. 24, # 13), “revulsion” (*ibid.*, p. 25, # 17), “be ruthless” (Evagrius Ponticos, *ibid.*, p. 33). In contrast, their passion for God was expressed with “love” (Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26, # 22; p. 27, # 24), “devotion” (*ibid.*, p. 27, # 24) and the like. Similar expressions were used also by Sufis.

7 A. Abel, “La ‘Refutation d’un Agarene’ de Barthélémy d’Édesse”, *Studia Islamica* 37 (1973), pp. 5–26, at p. 6.

8 “Τὰ βιβλία ὑμῶν ὅλα διήλθον ...”, PG 104: 1417B. “Οὔτω γὰρ καὶ ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε περὶ τοῦ Μουχάμετ ἀκριβῶς εἰδέναι ὡς ἡμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοί, διότι ἡμεῖς πρὸ τοῦ Μουχάμετ ἔσμεν καὶ ἀκριβῶς τὰ κατ’ αὐτοῦ ἅπαντα <οἶδαμεν>”, 1417A. “Καὶ οἶδαμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐγνωρίσαμεν, λοιπὸν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ ὀφείλεις μαθεῖν περὶ πάντων, ὧν οὐ γινώσκεις”, 1417D.

On close examination, however, Bartholomeus is proven an indeed knowledgeable student or observer of Islam, a good reader of Arabic,<sup>9</sup> and a versatile interlocutor in the art of rational argument; that is why he repeatedly, and with some enjoyment, calls his opponent (real or fictitious one) “ignorant”, “foolish”, “imprudent”, “misled”, “deceived”, “thoughtless”, and the like. From this point of view, Abel’s assertion that although in Greek and for Greek-speaking readers the text has lost “le contact avec la culture scolaire, de langue plus ou moins classique”, is unwarranted. If there is one thing of which one could accuse Bartholomeus is that, the way he is arguing, he is making religious faith too rational, too Biblical, too language and text bound! In this respect, the study of the text allows us to witness to the transformation, continuation and influence of the Hellenistic culture within the former eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire after the Arab invasions. Modern scholarship is revising rapidly its view about the so-called “dark ages” of Byzantium after, and because of, the Arab conquests.<sup>10</sup>

But above all Bartholomeus sees Islam as an irreverent religion and, thus, he does not refrain from being himself an irreverent controversialist. His Confutation is not but a polemic piece of literature which must be distinguished from those of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749) and Abū Qurra, for lack at least of order and appearance of objectivity. The text looks and reads like a rusted door; it leaves holes of all shapes and sizes through which one

9 Bartholomeus’ transcription of Arabic names such as Bayt al-Muqaddam (1400B), ‘Abd al-Muttālib, ‘Abd Allāh, Allāh [Alāh], Sāmat [Samêt], Jamat [Jamêt], is remarkable and the only possible in Greek. In the case of Sāmat [Samêt], however, he makes it a proper noun and he misinterprets or translates the key word *sāmad* of sura 114 literally as meaning “clearly, all-spherical, and all-rounded, someone who can be held and has a shape” (1385C). On the notion of God as “all-spherical” and its use in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, see D.J. Sahas, “‘Ὀλόσφαιρος’? A Byzantine Perception of the ‘God of Muhammad’”, in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and W.Z. Haddad (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida), 1995, 508 p., at 109–125 (see Chapter 25 in this volume).

10 Cf. *Byzantium in the early period of Islam* project and especially its first volume, ed. Averil Cameron and L.I. Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East. I. Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992). Cf. also D.J. Sahas, “Cultural Interaction during the Umayyad period. The “circle” of John of Damascus”, *ARAM Periodical* 6 (1994), pp. 1–32 (see Chapter 20 in this volume); *Idem*, “The Arab character of the Christian disputation with Islam. The case of John of Damascus (ca. 655–ca. 749)”, in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner (Wiesbaden, 1992), pp. 185–205 (see Chapter 21 in this volume). Cf. S. Griffith’s studies, such as “Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century: The Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*”, *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp. 117–138; and his *Collected Studies, in Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Brookfield, Vt., 1992).

can gain a glimpse of fact and legend, reality and perception, piety and distortion. Discrepancies in style by various editors who wanted to “improve” the text,<sup>11</sup> an erratic refutation,<sup>12</sup> and other internal evidence, have prompted Abel (a perpetual sceptic of the authenticity of Byzantine anti-Islamic texts, with the possible exception of Nicetas Byzantios), to declare this text inauthentic.<sup>13</sup>

From the text itself we learn much about the author’s temperament and style, very little about the environment and the circumstances of this writing, and almost nothing about the author himself, his life, his education and his confessional affiliation – nothing surprising, perhaps, for an ascetic! In a region chequered by diverse doctrinal loyalties, those of Bartholomeus are unstated. The region had a tradition of Nestorian leanings, and Southern Syria, and Edessa in particular with its famous theological school, were at the epicentre of the Monophysite controversies.<sup>14</sup> Was he a Nestorian, a Monophysite, or a Melchite monk? The decisive factor against the Nestorian affiliation of Bartholomeus is, I believe, that he uses the Chalcedonian and anti-Nestorian term *Theotokos*, and that he speaks of the human *nature* and the human body of Christ; in effect against Monophysitism.<sup>15</sup> We have no information also as

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- 11 See e.g. the interpolation of such late Byzantine or neo-Greek words as κάμπος, χρόνος, σκλάβα, μανδήλιον, φουστάτα, Σουλτάνος, σαπούνιον, κατούδιον and more.
- 12 On this score Abel is right when he asserts that “Barthélemy est incapable de s’en tenir à la ligne d’un argument”. Abel, “La ‘Refutation’”, p. 12.
- 13 “Car, à n’en pas douter, le ‘Barthélemy d’Édesse’ n’est qu’une compilation polémique en langue vulgaire, mise sous un nom d’auteur imaginaire”. Abel, “La ‘Refutation’”, p. 15. Without substantiating his thesis, Abel speaks of Bartholomeus I and of Bartholomeus II, the latter being a compiler, an interpolator and a reductionist of the former. In general, Abel’s thesis seems to be that an argument found in a text for the first time means that this text must be of a later date, rather than the source! But, then, when does an argument, or for that matter an author, begin and when does it become original?
- 14 Iba, bishop of Edessa (435–49, 451–57), accused of Nestorianism and deposed by the Council of Ephesus (431), was reinstated by the Council of Chalcedon (451). *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, (New York, 1991), pp. 970–1. Heraclius was refused communion in Edessa by metropolitan Isaiah for not anathematizing the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. Cf. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien; patriarche jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, ed. J.-B. Chabot (Paris, 1899–1910), XI, IV, 412. For the history of Edessa, the study of J.B. Segal, *Edessa ‘The Blessed City’* (Oxford, 1970) remains a basic reading. Cf. also H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980).
- 15 PG: 1384B twice; 1397B–C; 1417B; and 1401A; 1409D; 1412B. Bartholomeus’ Nestorian identity may be supported by his reference to Nestorian (“Chaldean”) sources for the life of Muhammad (1389C, 1420A), by his praise of the monk Bahira who instructed Muhammad (1428A; 1428A–1432B) and the respect which he seems to assign to him (1389D; 1396C–D). As indications of a possible Monophysite leaning one could cite the following references: 1397D; 1401A; 1409C–D; 1412B; 1396C; 1396D; 1397A. But the Monophysite identity must also be dispelled. Houry (*Les théologiens*, p. 267) sides with the opinion that Bartholomeus

to the time of Bartholomeus' life and writing, something which presents us with problems of interpretation. As usual in such instances, scholars indulge themselves in a frenzy of historical, literary, contextual (or not so contextual) acrobatics, in an effort to uphold the date which advances their own theory and methodological presuppositions. Thus, theories as to the chronology of the text have ranged from the ninth to the thirteenth century and even later. Karl Krumbacher has dated it in the ninth-century.<sup>16</sup> Abel<sup>17</sup> has argued in favour of the ninth century on the basis of a) the references to the four Shari'a schools<sup>18</sup> all dated in the ninth and beginning of the tenth century (Ibn Hanbal died in 855); b) the reference to Muhammad's name been written around the throne of God<sup>19</sup> pointing to al-Tabari as a source (d. 923); c) the assertion that the Qur'an is the Word of God, not created, confirmed as doctrine by caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861); d) the famous *Apocalypse of Bahira*, with a probable bearing upon the author, being a Nestorian work of the ninth century. These are significant points of evidences which, to our estimation, make the text particularly interesting for the history of Islam and of Muslim-Christian relations. Linguistic evidence and words belonging clearly to later centuries, have led some scholars to conclude that the work is the 11th–12th century,<sup>20</sup> while the same evidence and especially the reference to *Forakids* and their mystical rituals, has convinced Eichner<sup>21</sup> that this is a thirteenth century work. Khoury has refuted earlier dates and has concluded that Bartholomeus wrote *after* Euthymios Zigabenos (fl. ca. 1100), even in the thirteenth century, because Euthymios does not mention nor does he seem to make use of Bartholomeus; an argument which assumes *a priori* a later date for Bartholomeus! But even if Bartholomeus wrote before Zigabenos, Zigabenos would not necessarily have known of a work, of popular character, written two to three centuries earlier, in northern Syria, and by an obscure monk of whom we have no other writing! Instead of making Zigabenos the source of Bartholomeus, why not the opposite?

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was a Melchite, subject to and under the influence of Byzantium, as most of the monks were in his time. Bartholomeus speaks of Christianity as "our orthodox faith" which is one (1444A and 1404B), contrasting it, perhaps, to Islam and the early and passionate divisions among Muslims, especially on such issues as faith or works constituting Islam, createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'an, free will or predestination.

16 K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des Oströmischen Reiches* (527–1453), Munich 1897<sup>2</sup>, # 18.3, p. 78.

17 "La 'Refutation'" in *passim*.

18 PG: 1401C.

19 PG: 1392B.

20 Cf. Khoury, *Les théologiens*, p. 269, about Göterbock's thesis.

21 Eichner, "Die Nachrichten", p. 137.

Our own view is that this particular writing belongs squarely to the last two or three decades of the ninth century. All internal evidence suggests rather strongly that Bartholomeus is responding to a post Umayyad Islam, predominated by the forces and the ethos of the newly emerging Hadith, the Shari'a and especially Sufism in its second phase. Its first phase, characterized by asceticism, was more a protest movement against the spirit of secularism and extravagance of the Umayyad court. This protest gave rise to a collective and more organized group, forming its own spirituality, ritual, and code of conduct; a process reminiscent of the development of Christian monasticism from Antonian asceticism to the Pachomian cenobiticism.<sup>22</sup> Muslim mystical movements were conceivably enhanced by the experience, the thought, the writings, the style of life and the challenges of such figures as Bartholomeus and his like.

Three broader and methodological presuppositions have led me to prefer the ninth as the possible century of Bartholomeus' refutation. First, there is an enormous evidence which suggests that the earliest, and formative, apologetics against Islam originated from the monastic community; then, and only thinly and progressively, from the administrative-ecclesiastical Byzantine élite, and rarely from the secular sector.<sup>23</sup> Second, the whole phenomenon of earliest Islam makes more sense under the light and in the context of the monastic culture, ethos, and spirituality of Eastern Christianity, than has yet been recognized.<sup>24</sup> And third, earliest developments in the Muslim community on the theological, canonical, traditional, literary, social, cultural and spiritual level make again more sense viewed in conjunction, juxtaposition, or comparison with equivalent developments within Eastern Byzantine Christianity. Such assertions do not take away anything from the uniqueness of Islam as an autonomous religious tradition – not even its claim of revelation; they do see, however, religious phenomena in context, because rarely religions and religious phenomena develop in a vacuum, or in the stratosphere.

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22 On Sufism and its development, see especially A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London, 1950) and Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975).

23 On the different character, style and content of Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, see D.J. Sahas, "The Art and non-art of Byzantine Polemics. Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature", in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), pp. 55–73 (see Chapter 6 in this volume).

24 Cf. D.J. Sahas, "Monastic ethos and spirituality and the origins of Islam", in *Proceedings of the 18th International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (Moscow, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 26–38 (see Chapter 5 in this volume).

The elusive monk Bartholomeus represents a new and characteristic example of Byzantine anti-Islamic apologetics coming, certainly, after John of Damascus,<sup>25</sup> Abū Qurra<sup>26</sup> and the tradition they established in this field. He deviates from their method, amplifies their arguments, and goes beyond their style.<sup>27</sup> The former are descriptive, informative and, Abū Qurra in particular, scholastic and logical, dealing mostly with facts, theology and reason. Bartholomeus is polemical; he pushes the controversy to the existential level and resorts to attacks *ad hominem*. On the theological level he pities the Muslims for believing in an irrational and lifeless God that is, in a God without reason and without spirit or life – an obvious reference to the Muslim rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. This line is reminiscent of John of Damascus' founding argument which accuses the Muslims that by rejecting the personal character and the essential relationship of God's own reason and life they believe in a God who is like a stone or a piece of wood.<sup>28</sup> But Bartholomeus sees nothing novel in the Muslim belief in Allah and equates this name with the morning star which the Arabs worshipped during the *jāhiliyya*, the pre-Islamic period of darkness and ignorance.<sup>29</sup> More accurately and with less bias, John of Damascus distinguishes Muslim monotheism from the pre-Islamic pagan belief and worship of Aphrodite and the morning star.<sup>30</sup> Pointedly, however, and more eloquently, Bartholomeus discusses the concept "Word

25 D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972). John of Damascus' texts on Islam in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Vol. iv. *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica*, ed. B. Kotter, (Berlin, 1981), pp. 60–7, 427–38.

26 For Abū Qurra, see the works of S.H. Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750–c. 820 AD): a Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature*, Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1977; "Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Le Muséon* 92/1–2 (1979), pp. 29–35; "Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105/1 (1985), pp. 53–73; "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: the Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Parole de l'Orient* 14 (1987), pp. 79–107; "Faith and Reason in Christian *kalām*: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion". In *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and J.S. Nielsen, (Leiden, 1994).

27 Abel considers Abd al-Masih b. Ishaq al-Kindī's *Risala* (end of the 9th c.) as the source of most of Bartholomeus' arguments. "La 'Refutation'", pp. 19ff.

28 "Υμῶν λεγόντων, ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς λόγος ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πνεῦμα, πῶς λοιδορεῖτε ἡμᾶς ὡς ἑταιριαστάς; Ὁ γὰρ λόγος καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἀχώριστόν ἐστι τοῦ ἐν ᾧ πέφυκεν· εἰ οὖν ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἐστὶν ὡς λόγος αὐτοῦ, δῆλον, ὅτι καὶ θεὸς ἐστίν. Εἰ δὲ ἐκτός ἐστι τοῦ θεοῦ, ἄλογός ἐστι καθ' ὑμᾶς ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἄπνους. Οὐκοῦν φεύγοντες ἑταιριάξιν τὸν θεὸν ἐκόψατε αὐτόν. Κρείσσον γὰρ ἦν λέγειν ὑμᾶς, ὅτι ἑταῖρον ἔχει, ἢ κόπτειν αὐτόν καὶ ὡς λίθον ἢ ξύλον ἢ τι τῶν ἀναισθητῶν παρεισάγειν". Kotter, IV, pp. 63–4.

29 PG 104: 1396A.

30 Kotter, IV, 64.

of God” in Christianity with reference to God’s reason and life (that is, in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity), and in Islam as being the Qur’ān itself. This is a clear indication that Bartholomeus’ debate is taking place during the second/ninth century when the Muslim community was embroiled in the Mu’tazilite-orthodox controversy over the nature, as well as the createdness-uncreatedness issue, of the Qur’ān, much like the Christological controversies during the period of the Ecumenical Councils!<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Bartholomeus is aware of the four legal schools or, as more correctly he calls them, “four doctrines” of Islam, which he names after *Hanifā*, *Sefī*, *Melkī*, and *Ahmad Hambīl*. One has no difficulty in discerning here the Sharī’a masters, Abū Hanīfa (699–767), al-Shāfi’ī (767–820), Mālik b. Anas (710–795), and Ahmad b. Hanbal (780–855). This reference provides us with the *terminus ante quem* for dating the treatise, which is the date of death of Ahmad b. Hanbal (855).<sup>32</sup> One may notice the anachronism between the second and the third master. This may be explained either as an innocent error, or because of the proximity and significant overlap in the lives of Mālik b. Anas (710–795) and al-Shāfi’ī (767–820), or it might be taken as intentional. In the last case this may indicate the predominance of each school and the order in which their law came into actual practice.

But beyond all such important issues Bartholomeus concentrates his refutation on Muhammad, the Muslim claims and his cult, which make the author particularly agitated.<sup>33</sup> He attacks directly Muhammad’s prophethood, morality,<sup>34</sup> conduct, and statesmanship. For him there are objective and discernible criteria which authenticate prophethood; and these are *pronouncements* about events of the past and events to come, *commandments*, or laws, and *miracles*. Writes Bartholomeus:

31 On the affinity between the Christological controversies in Christianity and the doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Qur’ān in Islam, see D.J. Sahas, “The Christological Morphology of the Doctrine of the Qur’ān”. In *Pluralism, Tolerance and Dialogue: Six Studies*, ed. M. Darrol Bryant (Waterloo, ON, 1989), pp. 77–98 (see Chapter 3 in this volume); L. Gardet, “Théologie musulmane et pensée patristique”, *Revue Thomiste* 47 (1947); W.J. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology* (London, 1945) Pt. 1, 2, pp. 17f.; A. Josef van Ess, *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie* (Wiesbaden, 1977); W.M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1962); *Idem, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973); A.H. Wolfson, “The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity”, *Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956), pp. 1–18.

32 PG 104: 1401C.

33 The influence made by Bartholomeus’ refutation of Muhammad is attested to by fragments of his text found in a later Greek idiom in Ms. N° 71 de la Société historique, Université de Liege, dating from the second part of the 17th c., and published by A. Delatte, in *Anecdota Atheniensia*, vol. 1 (Liege, 1927), pp. 333–357, under the title “Ἱστορία τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ ἀνατροφῆς τοῦ Μωάμεθ”.

34 PG 104: 1433B and in *passim*.



Since you call him [Muhammad] a prophet, show me what he prophesied and with what words; what he commanded or what sign and marvel did he do.<sup>35</sup>

And elsewhere,

We [the Christians] call prophet him who foretells the future events, and what has happened in the past, and who shows signs and marvels. We do not know of such things done by Muhammad so that we may call him prophet, or apostle. If you know any, tell us; I do not. If you know, show it to me, where, and in which book has it been written.<sup>36</sup>

Bartholomeus claims that he has read all Muslim books and has found no evidence of Muhammad's prophethood:

I have read your books and I know them all. If he [Muhammad] were a prophet, as you claim, why, then, when he was about to fall from the horse was he not able to sit up, but he fell and he cut himself? Or as he was falling and about to lose his upper and lower teeth and break them, he did not prophesise of it, or did not know that this was going to happen in advance?<sup>37</sup>

Bartholomeus rejects also Muhammad's prophethood by going through an elaborate comparison between Mary and Amina, Jesus and Muhammad, and the way in which the last two were conceived. The proof of Jesus' superiority is his miracles. This is for Bartholomeus a criterion to prove Muhammad's incompatibility to Jesus.<sup>38</sup> By making such comparisons, Bartholomeus falls into the trap of reaffirming the Muslim understanding of Jesus as a mere mortal and *one* of the prophets; a kind of Islamization of Jesus and of a Christianization of Muhammad!<sup>39</sup> As far as miracles are concerned, Bartholomeus knows of the legends of the sun prostrating in front of Muhammad, and of the splitting

35 "Ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτὸν προφήτην καλεῖς, δεῖξον μοι τί ἐπροφήτευσεν, καὶ ἐν ποίῳ λόγῳ τοῦτο, καὶ τί κελεύει, ἢ τί σημεῖον καὶ τέρας πεποίηκεν", 1389A.

36 PG 104: 1392A, and in *passim*.

37 PG 104: 1389A.

38 "And yet", he concludes, "you shamelessly claim that Muhammad is like Jesus Christ"! PG 104: 1417BC, 1417D.

39 As all other Byzantine polemicists Bartholomeus, by using Christianity as the criterion for Islam, he actually Christianizes Islam. This treatise is not an exception. Notice, for example, how the conversation of Muhammad with Khadija before their marriage (1420B), is almost identical to that of Jesus with the Samaritan woman!

of the moon.<sup>40</sup> Such legends, however, grown out of Qur'ānic inferences, do not constitute miraculous acts equivalent to those which later Muslim piety and spirituality developed and attributed to Muhammad himself. The fact that Bartholomeus makes no reference to miracles performed by Muhammad himself, is indicative that traditional miracles, independent of Qur'ānic foundation, had not yet been produced; otherwise Bartholomeus would have a field day with them! Bartholomeus' challenge and his comparison of Muhammad to Jesus on this score may be seen as a provocation and a catalyst for Muslims to produce such miracles, which filled the hagiological-traditional *vitae* of the Prophet, for apologetic purposes.<sup>41</sup>

The "books" which Bartholomeus has read and which he has used as sources for the life of Muhammad are what he calls loosely "your Qur'ān".<sup>42</sup> But this does not mean that it is only the Qur'ān but every *kind* of Muslim religious source and literature; these "false pronouncements" of the Muslims, which he even calls *Evangelion* [Εὐαγγέλιον, i.e. Gospel]!<sup>43</sup> In reality the Muhammad whom Bartholomeus is attacking is the Muhammad of tradition and legend, enhanced by popular lore and Sufi spirituality, and his rising cult; a phenomenon attested to and articulated by Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*.<sup>44</sup> He seems also to have utilized apocryphal and at times not so favourable material for the Prophet which, naturally, did not find its way into the canonical Hadith. For example, he questions the tradition that Muhammad was saved from his Meccan persecutors when an angel and a spider covered the entrance of the cave.<sup>45</sup> Bartholomeus

40 PG 104: 1429CD; 1432D.

41 On this subject, see J. Horowitz, "The Growth of the Mohammed Legend", *The Moslem world* 10 (1920), pp. 49–58; R.J. McCarthy, "Al-Baqillani's Notion of the Apologetic Miracle", *Studia Biblica et Orientalia* 3 (1959), pp. 247–56; D.J. Sahas, "The formation of later Islamic Doctrines as a response to Byzantine polemics: The "miracles" of Muhammad", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), pp. 307–324 (see Chapter 4 in this volume).

42 PG 104: 1384A, 1385C, 1392C, 1393B, 1396A etc.; or "from your books" (1389A, 1392A, 1417AB.

43 "ἐλέγχω γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῆς γραφῆς ὑμῶν ... πάντα γὰρ τὰ ὑμέτερα βιβλία ἀνέγνω, καὶ ἔγνω" (1387); "αὐτὸ γὰρ τὸ Κοράνιον σου ἀνέγνω" (1389); "... καθὼς ἀνέγνω εἰς τὸ Κοράνιον σου" (1392) [sic ἐν τῷ Κορανίῳ σου]; "καὶ πάλιν [λαμβάνει τὸ Κοράνιον σου] ... (1393); "τὰ βιβλία ὑμῶν ὅλα διήλθον, καὶ οὐδεμίαν εὔρον ..." (1417); and 1385B.

44 A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (London, 1968<sup>2</sup>).

45 PG 104: 1389B. Muslim tradition, based on a rather vague Qur'ānic allusion (S. 9:40), has it that as they were fleeing from the Meccans, Muhammad and Abu Bakr hid in a cave over which a spider constructed its web and pigeons hurriedly built their nests. The disguise deceived the Meccans and the two were saved. The Persian poet Jāmi' has enumerated this among the miracles of Muhammad in his *Dīwān*. A Persian expression makes Abū Bakr *yār-i ghār*, "friend of the cave", and a Persian Sufi order teaches that in the cave Muhammad taught Abu Bakr the secret remembrance (*dhikr*) of God. Cf. Annemarie

claims instead that Muhammad was killed by the Quraish by being tied to the tail of a drunken camel, as he has this information from the “Chaldeans”.<sup>46</sup> This is an intriguing reference which may be taken as implying use of Nestorian sources and even Nestorian affiliation of Bartholomeus himself.<sup>47</sup> Nestorian sources do provide information about Muhammad’s genealogy, his ancestors for two generations back, as well as details about his birth, and his early life,<sup>48</sup> and Bartholomeus finds such information particularly attractive for his refutation.<sup>49</sup> But this is a weak kind of evidence of any Nestorian affiliation of Bartholomeus. His definite expression “the very Chaldean writings *of yours*”, dispels such a suggestion. Because immediately before this point Bartholomeus compares Amina to Mary and Muhammad to Jesus, refuting the equation of the former to the later, I venture to suggest that any “Nestorians” (that is to say, Nestorian-minded Muslims) who might have been interested in *this* kind of information about Muhammad, would be those searching for “the historical Muhammad” – the “human” Muhammad, free from the layers of the superhuman which Muslim piety had started placing over his personality. We may want to read here undertones of a reaction against Muslim Persian piety, and possibly against Shi’ite mystical trends of union of the human with the divine, reminiscent of those of al-Hallāj who proclaimed *anā al-haqq* (“I am the truth”), because God is truth and man is God. Al-Hallāj, the mystic, died on the cross only in 922(?). With his vehement attack on Muhammad of faith,<sup>50</sup> Bartholomeus sides with the “Nestorian” Muslims and contributes ruthlessly to the demythologisation of Muhammad. On this score he is sarcastic, obnoxious, and provocative. One wonders how could he do that at a time of a rising cult of the Prophet, with the Muslims having the upper hand in the political and military sphere. He must have either been seeking martyrdom, or acting with impunity behind the safety of the walls of a monastery.

As a monk and most likely an ascetic himself, Bartholomeus shows a special awareness of and sensitivity towards popular piety and spirituality, including Sufi practices and ideals, all of them in their embryonic stage. He knows of “God’s poor” among the Sufis whom he correctly calls *Forakides* (obviously from

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Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his messenger: the veneration of the Prophet in Islamic piety* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985) pp. 280 (n. 55), and 13.

46 PG 104: 1389B.

47 Khoury, *Les théologiens*, pp. 266–7.

48 PG 104: 1389C, 1420A.

49 PG 104: 1417A.

50 On Muhammad of history and Muhammad of faith, see J.E. Royster, “The Study of Muhammad: A survey of approaches from the perspective of the History and Phenomenology of Religion”, *The Muslim world* 62 (1972), pp. 49–70.

*fuqarā'*, pl. of *faqīr* = poor), whose ritual prayer (*dhikr*) includes dancing and music; a very important piece of information coming from an external source about the history of the Sufi movement.<sup>51</sup> He often also refers to Muhammad's ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*), an early tradition based on a Qur'ānic allusion ("Praised be He who travelled by night with His servant from the sacred mosque to the farther sanctuary" 17:1), and a popular theme of inspiration for Sufis who, if not physically like the Prophet, were seeking at least a spiritual union with the divine. But it is the elaborate popular version, or versions, of *mi'rāj* which the author correctly attributes to the authority of Fatima,<sup>52</sup> which has in mind and ridicules: "Muhammad, being earthly, a creature, a servant, a mortal and corruptible, did not ascend into heaven. Do not deceive yourself believing as true that he ascended into heaven, by the fact that Fatima, his daughter, testified to this".<sup>53</sup> Bartholomeus' repeated references to the *mi'rāj* and to its variations, point to its early stage of development and, perhaps, to its adaptation to such Christian ascetic spiritual works as John Climacus' *Celestial Ladder* (end of the sixth century). One has to remember that *mi'rāj* literally means "ladder"! Otherwise one has to explain the coincidence that one of the earliest translations of the *Ladder* in Syriac found in the Syriac codex (Add. MS 14593) of the British Museum, and bearing the date 817, was written in Edessa!<sup>54</sup> Bartholomeus may well be the earliest commentator and perhaps defender of the *Ladder* from, what he perceived as, misunderstood appropriations and distortions of it by the Sufis!

Bartholomeus also knows and calls a Sufi *zekhêtes*,<sup>55</sup> (a correct transliteration of the word *zāhid*, pl. *zāhidūn*, *zuhhād*), an adjective derived from the virtue of abstinence (*zāhid*), originally from sin, and later from anything superfluous that estranges man from God.<sup>56</sup> On the question of dating Bartholomeus, it is interesting to note that this last meaning of *zuhd* belongs to Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855), the most orthodox of Muslim theologians, who applauded the virtue of abstinence and who even wrote a treatise entitled *Kitāb al-Zuhd* ("The book of Abstinence")! *Zuhd* gradually evolved into "something quite different:

51 PG 104: 1428Bc.

52 PG 104: 1392C.

53 PG 104: 1400D.

54 J.R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus* (Princeton, 1954), p. 6. W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1870-72), part II, pp. 590f.

55 PG 104: 1416B.

56 Cf. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Supplement) I, p. 352. On the question of borrowing of ascetic observances from Christianity, Manichaeism or Hinduism by the Muslims, cf. L. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique* (Paris, 1922), pp. 45-80.

a total disregard of worldly wealth and ambition exalted into an entire absorption with the fear, and then the service, and finally the love of God”, where one enters deep into the realm of the Sufis.<sup>57</sup> Bartholomeus interchanges the adjective *zekhêtes* with “hesychast” (ἡσυχαστής)<sup>58</sup> for a Sufi, which shows that “hesychasm”, as a word and practice, has much earlier representatives than the fourteenth-century St. Gregory Palamas!<sup>59</sup> In fact, as the *Philokalia* itself makes manifest, the art and science of spirituality with all its culture and expressions (contemplation, prayer, fasting, pursuit of otherworldly concerns, communal or solitary life etc.), or the life of *hesychia* (in the sense of tranquillity, silence, stillness or concentration, “being seated” in, or fixed with God) is an early experience of the Christian East, going back to the fourth century (e.g. to St. Isaiah the solitary) if not even earlier to St. Anthony himself, the father of anchorite monasticism.<sup>60</sup> The story of Muhammad’s *mīrāj* which aimed at affirming Muhammad’s prophethood and his affinity with God produced and cemented the early Muslim belief in the intercessory powers of the Prophet, an early belief which, again, sought and found support (although not readily) in such Qur’ānic allusions as surah 2:256, 17:79, and 40:7.<sup>61</sup> Bartholomeus is particularly agitated by this doctrine which he sets himself to ridicule.

In view of a multifaceted spiritual context within which Bartholomeus examines everything of Muhammad and Islam, it is not surprising that he attributes the entire upbringing of Muhammad to the legendary monk Bahira. So much so that he considers that whatever truth happens to be found in the Qur’ān comes from Bahira, while everything that is untrue has come from ‘Uthmān, the third caliph, to whom the authoritative edition of the Qur’ān is attributed.<sup>62</sup> In other instances, however, Bartholomeus denigrates Muhammad and Bahira as deceivers. Muhammad deceived his people that he was fasting for thirty days and nights in order to prepare himself to meet the angel of God, while in reality Bahira had been offering him instruction and food daily in order to baptize him a Christian and set him free from the Arabs – “Arabs” meaning

57 Cf. Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 45. For the meaning of *zuhd* and its progression, see “Zuhd” in H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Ithaca, 1965), p. 661. Arberry’s analysis fits perfectly Bartholomeus’ description and language.

58 PG 104: 1416B. Beck also [*Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung in der theologischen Literatur der Byzantiner*. (Rome, 1937), p. 47, n. 64] identifies a *zekhêtes* with a *hesychast*. Khoury, *Les théologiens*, pp. 271–2.

59 Cf. *Philokalia*, I, pp. 14–15.

60 Cf. J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959), and *Idem*, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY, 1974).

61 Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger*, p. 83.

62 PG 104: 1389D. Cf. also 1393B and 1428–32.

“Muslims”.<sup>63</sup> Bartholomeus makes Bahira, the Christian monk who according to the *Sīra* foretold Muhammad’s prophethood, a Nestorian,<sup>64</sup> unlike John of Damascus who makes him an Arian.<sup>65</sup>

The Muslim ritual and conduct also attracted Bartholomeus’ attention, and wrath. He either did not understand, or he purposefully distorted the ritual of purification before prayer (*wudūʿ*). Misinformation about each other’s religion and distortions based on popular observation or hearsay is a common phenomenon in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, and this is not an exception.<sup>66</sup> Bartholomeus turns the ritual from an act of purification to an act of pollution, with Muhammad being the responsible agent. The Muslims, according to Bartholomeus, have been instructed by their prophet to put their finger into their seat and then wash their mouth and face with it. The practice, according also to him, becomes even more abominable in the desert or on mountains where the worshipper cannot find water and has to use sand.<sup>67</sup> One cannot miss Bartholomeus’ insistence, if not pleasure, in revisiting the subject in order to show that the Muslims pay attention to the cleanliness of the body while ignoring the uncleanness of the soul from sin.<sup>68</sup> He even addresses a jesting slang epithet (“πλυνόκωλε”) to characterize the Muslim as “one with a well washed up behind!”<sup>69</sup> Similarly he misrepresents the posture of muezzin when calling people to prayer that he puts one finger in his ear and the other in his seat and in this posture he cries out “God is great ...”!<sup>70</sup> This is one of the grossest misunderstandings by any Byzantine polemicist. In the way he expresses his disapproval for the ablutions and the benefit of water for

63 PG 104: 1428D–1429B. On the ethnic identity of religion in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, see D.J. Sahas, “The Notion of “Religion” with reference to Islam in the Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature”. In *The Notion of “Religion” in Comparative Research. Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990*, ed. U. Bianchi (Rome, 1994), pp. 523–530 (see Chapter 1 in this volume).

64 “... ὑπήρχεν ἐκέϊσε τις μοναχὸς ἡσυχαστῆς Νεστοριανῶ ἔχων δόγματι, τοῦνομα Παχυράς”, 1428A.

65 “... ὅς (Muhammad) τῆ τε παλαιᾷ καὶ νέᾳ διαθήκῃ περιτυχῶν, ὁμοίως ἀρειανῶ προσομιλήσας δῆθεν μοναχῶ ἰδίαν συνεστήσατο αἴρεσιν”. Kotter, IV, p. 60, 12–13.

66 Cf. C.S. Hurgonje, *Verspreide Geschriften*, vol. II (Bonn, 1924), pp. 64ff.

67 PG 104: 1408BC.

68 “Ἴδοῦ γοῦν λέγω σοι· οὔτε ἀπὸ ὕδατος ἀγιάζεται ἡ ψυχὴ, οὔτε ἀπὸ χρώματος. Εἰ μὲν οὖν λέγετε, ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἱερωμένη, καὶ οὐκ ἔχει χρεῖαν εἰς τὸ ἱεροῦν αὐτὴν οὔτε ἀπὸ ὕδατος, οὔτε ἀπὸ χρώματος· καὶ γὰρ λέγω σοι, ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνοῦται τῷ σώματι. Καὶ σὺ πῶς λέγεις, ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ ἡγιασμένη ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τὸ σῶμα, ἐπεὶ μαιρὸν ἐστὶ, χρὴ καθεκάστην αὐτὸ πλύνειν μετὰ τοῦ ὕδατος;” 1409A.

69 PG 104: 1413B.

70 PG 104: 1445C.

purification, Bartholomeus betrays an extreme ascetic mentality and leaves himself open to criticism that he is against any physical cleanliness.

Not unexpectedly also and with the same spirit of denigration, Bartholomeus becomes repetitive, sarcastic and caustic on matters of character, moral and sexual conduct of Muhammad. He depicts him as a ruthless ruler, who orders the killing of those who do not acknowledge him as a prophet, and as a licentious man who contracted multiple marriages by deceiving young women and their parents. For the austere ascetic and purist Bartholomeus, the consummation of his marriage with Khadijah and with Aisha, amounts to “deflowering”.<sup>71</sup>

In spite of the problems with which the refutation presents us and beyond the issues on which we have already touched, this treatise contains many interesting points of historical, theological and comparative nature which space does not allow us to discuss here in detail. Getting a taste only we will mention the following. Bartholomeus knows and reports accurately on the Muslim doctrine of the corruption of scriptures (*tahrīf*), specifically in terms of concealment of the original gospel and of presenting a different one. The Muslim of Bartholomeus makes the Gospel a scripture sent down from heaven, much like the Qurʾān. To him the Christians have concealed this authentic gospel and replaced it with one of their own.<sup>72</sup> He knows also the *bismillah*, but he places it at the beginning of the Qurʾān rather than at the beginning of each surah;<sup>73</sup> an interesting “mistake” (?) which is in perfect tune with the Muslim treatment of each surah as a “recital” (*qurʾān*), and a reference to the earliest perhaps format of the Qurʾān. He knows also of the history of the canon of the Qurʾān.<sup>74</sup> He reports that Muslims treat Muhammad and believe in him as “brother of Christ”;<sup>75</sup> an interesting insight into the popular sentiment and spirituality during Bartholomeus’ time. He also knows of many names whom the Muslims accept as prophets, and he is aware of the distinction between *nabī* and *rasūl*.<sup>76</sup> He also knows of the Muslim prohibition of pork.<sup>77</sup> Bartholomeus

71 “... και διεπαρθενεύσατο αὐτήν”, 1420C and 1420D.

72 “Διὰ τί τὸ κατελθὸν Εὐαγγέλιον ἐκρύψατε, καὶ νέον ἐγράψατε;” 1384C–85A.

73 “Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα οὐ ἀρχὴ ἐν αὐτοῦ Κουρανίου σου, ὄντινα ἐλεούντα καὶ ἐλεήμονα μὲν ἀποκαλείτε ...” 1385C.

74 PG 104: 1444C–45A.

75 “How, then, do you call him [Muhammad] brother of Christ? Not only he is a sinful [person] but clearly an enemy of God, as you know, because before he believed he was a thief, an agent of the night (νυκτοπόρος) and a bandit who killed many people in their sleep; and all these for women?” 1388BC.

76 Cf. PG 104: 1416B–D, 1389CD.

77 “... And immediately after they say that, he who eats pork does not enter paradise because God’s paradise is polluted [from this]”, 1393D. Eating of pork is explicitly prohibited by the Qurʾān (5:3 and 2:173).

makes performing the ablutions and abstaining from pork a Muslim requirement for entering paradise. Neither is stated in the Qurʾān as a precondition. The admonition must be sought in the Hadith and in Sufi spirituality. Bartholomeus refers by name to surah 5 “The Table [Spread]” (*al-Māʾidah*) which he uses when discussing the Muslim belief that God is the cause of good and evil;<sup>78</sup> an inference to the Jabrite-Qadarite controversy over man’s freedom of will or, more accurately, man’s own independent power to act (αὐτεξούσιον). Bartholomeus may be referring here to the first verse of this surah, “Lo! Allah ordaineth that which pleases Him”, which has been interpreted as in God there is neither good nor evil. The first verses of this surah refer to dietary laws, and this particular sentence must be read in this context, that what God ordains is His will which is beyond the characterization of good or evil. Bartholomeus also knows that for Muslims it is a doctrine that the Qurʾān is the actual Word of God; a reminder of the early controversies over the createdness/uncreatedness of the Word of God between the orthodox and the Muʿtazilites. As a good “Muʿtazilite”-minded, Bartholomeus challenges his opponent to explain how the Word of God (the Qurʾān) as uncreated can be united to paper or to the skin on which it is written.<sup>79</sup> The key, and correct, word he uses here for the Qurʾān, and for Christ (in the case of Muslim apologetics against Christianity), is κτιστόν (“created”).<sup>80</sup> In Bartholomeus we have a most interesting allusion to the physical appearance of the Qurʾān:

Tell me now, how did the Word of God get united with the paper that is, your Qurʾān, and the leather skin, so that your Qurʾān can qualify as pre-eternal word of God? Small children in the streets are holding your Qurʾān. As they go out every day to do their business they happen to place it down next to them and sit on; in other words, throughout the day, your children are holding this [in their hands] and one time they step on it, another they play with it, other times they hit each other with it. How is, then, your Qurʾān Word of God, and of the same origin?<sup>81</sup>

78 “Thus, your Qurʾān at the beginning of [the sūrah] *The Table* says that good and evil both derive from God for humans. You are also making God responsible for everything good and [for everything] evil, including the robbers, the wizards, the murderers. And those who die a bitter death say that, so was it written by God”, 1393B.

79 PG 104: 1396B and 1409BC.

80 PG 104: 1396C. John of Damascus adds the adjective “servant” for Christ in the mouth of a Muslim (Kotter, IV, 61, 19). Although the word is missing from Bartholomeus’ particular point, it is not missing from his understanding and vocabulary: “Καὶ αὐθις λέγεις, Ὁ Χριστὸς ἠΰχετο, καὶ ὁ εὐχόμενος δοῦλος ἐστὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ”, 1400D.

81 PG 104: 1396B. The adjective here is *σύναρχος* [(of the same beginning, or rule) instead, perhaps, of *συνάναρχος* (of no beginning, too)] which, if intentionally, may have dual



The passage describes, perhaps, actual occurrences and use of the Qur'ān which Bartholomeus might have seen! Bartholomeus also makes reference to the Muslim sciences of astronomy, mathematics, poetry, commentary (*tafsīr*) and medicine; an important reference to the state of intellectual life of the Muslim community at his time, and to the activities of *Bayt al-Hikma* (or House of Wisdom) established by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833)! Furthermore, he quotes verbatim the *sūrat al-Fatihah*,<sup>82</sup> the *shahada*,<sup>83</sup> and the exclamation *Allahu akbar*, texts and formulas with which anyone living in a Muslim environment would be, of course, familiar. The most impressive feature of the Refutation are Muhammad's genealogies,<sup>84</sup> as well as the names of Muhammad's wives and children which Bartholomeus transliterates in Greek with an admirable accuracy and sequence. He would, certainly, not have been able to cite so many of them if he did not have some source in front of him. His boasting, therefore, that he had read all Muslim books is not entirely unjustifiable, and his knowledge of Islam was most likely higher than that of an average Muslim at his times.

There are, however, problematic areas also in this text the investigation of which may lead us to apocryphal sources, or to intentional motivation to distort the truth. For example, Bartholomeus makes Muhammad ten years younger than known, "living for thirty two years in idolatry" prior to "The Night of Power and Excellence";<sup>85</sup> an intentional misrepresentation, I would suggest, to compare and contrast his life to the life of Jesus living all his thirty three years in sanctity! He states that when to serve as witnesses, the Islamic law requires ten women in the place of one man;<sup>86</sup> This is in variance with Islamic law which requires two women in the place of one man; possibly an intentional distortion in order to emphasize the lower status and the subordination of women in Islam. He correctly identifies Muhammad's wife Miriam as an "Egyptian", but he confuses Egypt with Damascus!<sup>87</sup> He makes Muhammad an epileptic on the basis, perhaps, of the traditional incident at Halima's home as

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meaning of "one of the same origin (or source) also" and "co-ruler" or lord: the Qur'ān is "lord" as God is, because it is uncreated and co-eternal.

82 "We thank you, o God and Lord of all, the abyss of mercy, the incorruptible judge in the day of judgement, and king. Grant to us straight paths, which you have granted to your saints to walk on them; not the path taken by those who have been angered, or those who have gone astray. Amen.", a most interesting and accurate translation of the surah in Greek! 1405C.

83 PG 104: 1445C.

84 PG 104: 1417D–20B.

85 PG 104: 1388B.

86 PG 104: 1392D and 1393D.

87 PG 104: 1420D.

a child recorded in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*.<sup>88</sup> To my knowledge, Bartholomeus is the first Byzantine polemicist who makes this specific allegation, and he may be the originator of what subsequently became a standard subject of anti-Islamic polemics. He makes also the allegation that those who opposed Muhammad were put to death, including his uncle Abū Tālib, confused here with 'Abd al-'Uzzā, nicknamed in the Qur'ān as Abū Lahab, "The Father of Flame", who died as a pagan (surah 111).<sup>89</sup> He knows about the well Zam Zam but, incorrectly, he connects this instead of pillars to the stoning of the devil during the hajj;<sup>90</sup> unless we have here information about an earlier ritual of castigating the devil by throwing pebbles into the well instead of against stone pillars.

If one's sources reveal the person, what were Bartholomeus' sources? Abel has surmised that these are the author's own memoirs, or possibly his "lectures" (!), but mainly "se sentretiens et de traditions orales".<sup>91</sup> From descriptions of Muslim practices we may assume that Bartholomeus had observed Muslim practice in action. On the other hand, when he refers to an *imām* ascending to a high place (obviously to the *mimbar*) we may assume that he had received information about public prayer through some other source; it would be unlikely for a Christian ascetic to have been allowed inside a mosque during prayer, nor would have an ascetic been interested in such a visit. On the other hand, as a monk himself, with an interest in ascetic spirituality, Bartholomeus would have inquired and learned more about the Sufis and their prayer practices. Sufi spirituality seems to be transmitted in the form of stories and anecdotes, in the manner of *apophthegmata patrum* in the Christian East; thence Bartholomeus' resorting to an anecdote about the ascetic (*zuhdī*) who claimed to have known all prophets and being able to count all of them.<sup>92</sup> Bartholomeus' description of a Sufi gathering (*fālīha*) and their *dhikr* – the earliest reference to such a ritual by a Christian author that I am aware of and, admittedly, the most serious point which may force us to place the refutation at a later date – may allow us to assume that he may have been privy to such a gathering; a most interesting possibility and an insight into Muslim-Christian relations on the spiritual level! From the plethora and diversity of subjects, the genealogies and onomatologies, the specificity of description, the accuracies and even the inaccuracies found in his refutation, we must conclude that Bartholomeus knew Islam not from hearsay, sketchy notes, casual discussions,

88 *Sīra*, pp. 105–6/71–2.

89 *PG* 104: 1436D–37A.

90 *PG* 104: 1437C.

91 "La 'Réfutation'", p. 23.

92 *PG* 104: 1416B.

or frivolous debates, but rather from a personal experience and from access he had to written sources, in Arabic. Definitely, this Refutation does not betray “un témoin oculaire, d’un voyageur”, as Abel has stated,<sup>93</sup> nor an amorphous compilation of Christian arguments in response to Muslim polemics.

Our own assessment tends to be leaning towards the opposite direction; that the *Confutation* is an example of a comprehensive, lively, and existential encounter between Byzantine Christianity and Islam, within the characteristic *Syro-Palestinian* context of a humanistic-Hellenistic culture, spirituality and theological acumen, all of which are now challenged and suppressed by the relatively recent conquests of Islam. The treatise constitutes and it is reflective of a mixture of popular as well as advanced type of argumentation, mutually about Islam and Christianity and their respective communities. Thus it represents less a primitive and more a developed stage of encounter between Islam and Byzantine Christianity. This text is not an official statement of faith, nor an apology of the kind of the *Refutation* of Nicetas Byzantios (842–912),<sup>94</sup> nor an official document like *The Letter to the Emir at Damascus* by the Metropolitan of Caesareia, Arethas (850–932).<sup>95</sup> This is a writing that bears all the characteristics of a *personal* refutation by a monk who is agitated (in fact, offended) by Islam as a religion, by the cult of Muhammad, and by the gross claims of Muslims against Christianity; thence its spontaneity, repetitiveness, vehemence, and its excessive caricaturing of Muhammad and of Islam!

One would have only wished that, having resorted to the monastic expression of humility which makes him “the least of all”, Bartholomeus would have sought to discover and speak also of the essential ethos of “Islam” as a total submission, and of the meaning and implications of “Muslim” as he who is totally submitted to God, and have found such fundamental characteristics and expressions congenial to his own Orthodox monasticism, to start building bridges of understanding between his own and the tradition of the “other”! In this respect one, perhaps, could say that his formalities of humility were just that, *formalities*, stated for internal consumption and for making his account more believable. But on the other hand, we must remember that with this text we are in the ninth-century Syria, within a *former* Byzantine-Christian region! Therefore for Bartholomeus, more than an abstract, spiritual, religious experience and matter, Islam was a crude manifestation of the reality of the

93 Abel, “La ‘Réfutation’”, p. 22.

94 PG 105: 808–41.

95 Cf. D.J. Sahas, “Arethas’ ‘Letter to the Emir at Damascus’: Official or popular views on Islam in the 10th century Byzantium”, *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 3 (1984), pp. 69–81 (see Chapter 27 in this volume).

Arab conquests which meant, to say the least, the treatment of the land as *dār Islām*, a land tax (*kharāj*), the belief in the incarnation of the Word of God in Christ being treated as a heresy and blasphemy! Against such realities one may understand why the arguments may have *had* to be heated, the “logic” may have *had* to be sarcastic, and the language may have *had* to be vulgar and derogatory! From this point of view Khoury seems to be anachronistic and too idealistic when he contends that “Barthélemy se soucie peu non seulement des règles de la composition littéraire, mais aussi des exigences de la discrétion chrétienne”.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Khoury, *Les théologiens*, p. 260.

## What an Infidel Saw That a Faithful Did Not: Gregory Dekapolites (d. 842) and Islam

In his presentation Professor Haddad spoke about the cultural unity of Islam and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, as well as of the mutuality of questions and answers given by men of faith in the two religious traditions. Professor Nasr spoke eloquently about the spiritual affinity of the two traditions as these are manifested in the Şüfi and the monastic traditions respectively. To these two spheres of “dialogue” I want to add the worship and liturgical experience, which the Christian East sees as a vital and dynamic forum in which men of faith can meet in a unique encounter; an experience which they can cultivate as a unique dimension and component of a true inter-faith dialogue.

The particular text I have in mind seems also to combine and reinforce the elements which Professors Haddad and Nasr have presented to us.

In Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* there is a rather brief “Historical Sermon” attributed to Saint Gregory of Dekapolis, under the long title: “A Historical Sermon by Gregory Dekapolites; Very Profitable and Most Pleasing in Many Ways, About a Vision Which a Sarracen Once Had, and Who, As a Result of This, Believed and Became Martyr for Our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Ferdinandus Cavallera has indexed this sermon under the patristic and Byzantine polemic literature against Islam.<sup>2</sup> However, modern scholars of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature have bypassed this piece.<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, this is an hagiological text which describes the conversion of a Muslim prince to Christianity, indeed to monastic life, and his subsequent death as a martyr of the Christian faith. The Muslim convert after his conversion to Christianity and his entrance into the

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1 PG 100.1201–12.

2 Ibid. 162.129.

3 Adel-Théodore Khoury, for example, following H.-G. Beck (*Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* [Munich, 1959], p. 579), suggests simply that “Le récit attribué au Decapolite, outre qu’il appartient au genre hagiographique et donc ne fait pas partie des textes qui nous intéressent directement ici, doit être daté du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle environ.” *Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam. Textes et auteurs (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> S.)* (Louvain, 1969) p. 46. While the text is definitely hagiological, it is not, because of this, irrelevant to Muslim-Christian relations. The assumption also that it dates from the fourteenth century can easily be questioned, on the basis of a number of internal indications, as the subsequent analysis of the text will show.

monastic order assumed the name Pachomios, a common name among monks in the Christian East, after the founder of the cenobitic monasticism.

An introductory invocation (“Father, give your blessing”) and a supplicatory ending (“With the prayers of the most blessed martyr and of the all-pure Mother of God Mary who is ever-virgin, and of all the saints, for the remission of our sins. Amen.”) betray a text which has survived as a lection, usually read during meals in the refectories of cenobitic monasteries in the Orthodox world.

However, beyond the exact purpose and character of the narrative and even if this was not the intention of its writer, the story has succeeded in providing us with insights and information about Muslim-Christian relations in the eight/ninth century.

The author of this sermon, as the title indicates, is Gregory Dekapolites. Information about Gregory we obtain mainly from a *Life* composed by Ignatius (b. ca. 780), “deacon and sacristan of the Great Church of God,” that is, of the see of Constantinople, who became later a professor of rhetoric and poetry at the patriarchal school of Hagia Sophia and, from 845, bishop of Nicaea.<sup>4</sup> Ignatius lived during the second phase of the Iconoclastic controversy (787–843). He authored *vitae* of two other iconophile personalities,<sup>5</sup> like of his own teacher Tarasios, patriarch of Constantinople (784–806),<sup>6</sup> and Nikephoros, patriarch of Constantinople (806–815).<sup>7</sup> Ignatius’ choice to write the *Lives* of these three men betrays his sympathy towards the moderate iconophiles, rather than the more “intransigent” monks of the monastery of Studios in Constantinople. The latter advocated a total segregation between Church and State, and opposed hesychastically inclined monks such as Gregory.<sup>8</sup>

Gregory was born in Irenopolis, one of the ten cities (*deka poleis*) which composed the complex of Dekapolis of Isauria in Interior Syria and Jordan;<sup>9</sup> thence

4 F. Dvornik, *La vie de saint Grégoire le Decapolite et les Slaves Macédoniens au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Travaux publiés par l’Institut d’ études slaves No. 5, Paris, 1926); Greek text of the *Life*, pp. 45–75. Dvornik has edited the *Life* from eight manuscripts, three of them of the twelfth, one of the thirteenth, two of the fourteenth, one of the sixteenth and one of the seventeenth century!

5 I.E. Karagiannopoulos, *Πηγαὶ τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἱστορίας*, 4th ed. (Thessalonike, 1978), pp. 228–29.

6 I.A. Heikel, ed. *Ignatii diaconi Vita Tarasii archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani*. Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae, 17 (Helsingfors, 1891); also, PG 98.1385–1424.

7 Carolus de Boor, *Nicephori opuscula historica* (Leipzig, 1889); PG 100.41–160.

8 Cf. Dvornik, *La Vie*, p. 17ff.

9 The other nine cities were Germanicopolis, Titiopolis, Dometiopolis, Zenopolis, Neapolis, Claudiopolis, Caesarea, Lauzados and Dalisandis. Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *De thematibus libri duo* (ed. I. Bekker, Bonn, 1840), 1, p. 36.

his surname Dekapolites. He was born in between 780–790<sup>10</sup> and possibly later.<sup>11</sup> The only firm date of his life is that of his death on 20 November 842.<sup>12</sup> Early in his life, Gregory left home for the ascetic and contemplative life of the monastery. After a number of years, spent either in monasteries or in solitude as a hermit, he felt the need to embark on a missionary expedition, defending the iconophiles and the veneration of icons, and healing people. His long travels led him to Ephesos, Prokonessos, Ainos, Christopolis (Kavala), Thessalonike, Corinth, Region, Neapolis, Rome, Syracuse, Ontranto, Thessalonike again and Constantinople. Gregory's public life coincides with the reign of Emperor Theophilos (829–842) during which time Iconoclasm was raging again.

The *Life* of Gregory Dekapolites is an hagiological account, embellished with numerous miraculous acts, something which reflects mainly the interests of its author, Ignatius. Nevertheless, it constitutes a source of information on the state of Iconoclasm during its second phase (787–843), and on the Slavs in the area of Thessalonike. Some incidents of Byzantine-Arab relations are mentioned only marginally. Actually the *Life* mentions only one incident involving Muslim Arabs: Gregory, as he was leaving Otranto, Italy, encountered a unit of Saracen soldiers. When one of them raised his hand to kill Gregory with a spear, the soldier's hand instantly became stiff. Gregory healed his offender by touching the former's afflicted hand.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the entire *Sermon* attributed to Gregory – possibly his only extant writing – is an account of a Muslim-Christian encounter. Ignatius mentions no writings by Gregory Dekapolites, not even this historical sermon that explicitly bears his name. However this omission, by itself, ought not to be taken as sufficient proof that the writing is not of Gregory Dekapolites.

The *Sermon* is based on a story which, as the text claims, was related to Gregory by a certain *strategos*<sup>14</sup> Nicholas. The incident took place in the strategos' own town of Al-Kurūm<sup>15</sup> in the Thebaid, lower Egypt. Here is the text:

10 H.G. (Henri Grégoire) in his review of Dvornik's *La vie*, in *Byzantion* 7 (1932), 642.

11 The *Life* states that Gregory died "at a mature age as far as the spiritual and perfect exercise is concerned." Dvornik, *La vie*, p. 72, 1.10–11. This wording may imply that he died at a relatively young physical age. Indeed, according to the *Life*, Gregory died after a serious and painful disease. Ibid. p. 70, 1.12–16.

12 This specific date is stated in the *Life* of Joseph the hymnographer [H.G. in *Byzantion* 7 (1932), 643], and corroborated by the evidence in Gregory's *Life*. Dvornik, *La vie*, p. 72; 1.9

13 Dvornik, *La vie*, p. 58; 1.15–9.

14 A Byzantine high military official in charge of the administration of a *thema*, or large territory or province.

15 The Arabic name of the town means "vineyard," which Gregory has translated in Greek as *Ampelos*.

A HISTORICAL SPEECH OF GREGORY DEKAPOLITES, VERY PROFITABLE AND MOST PLEASING IN MANY WAYS, ABOUT A VISION WHICH A SARRACEN ONCE HAD, AND WHO, AS A RESULT OF THIS, BELIEVED AND BECAME A MARTYR FOR OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

[1201A] Father, give your blessing.

Nicholas the *strategos*, called Joulas, has related to me that in his own town, which the Sarracens<sup>16</sup> call in their language “Vineyard”, the Emir<sup>17</sup>

16 The name “Sarracen” (actually, Saracen) is used here meaning “Muslim.” It occurs frequently in Byzantine literature. Philip K. Hitti has suggested that the name derives from the Arabic *sharq* and *sharqiyūn* (East, and Easterners) and refers to the land and the tribes east of Palestine (*History of the Arabs* [10th ed., New York, 1973, p. 43.]). Other evidence, which I am presently examining, suggest that the use of the name “Saracen” contained also derogatory connotations, for Easterners, who were living far away from the main centers of civilization and who were led astray from accepted religious beliefs and practices. After the emergence of Islam the name “Saracen” in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature was used with the meaning of “Muslim.” John of Damascus is perhaps the earliest Byzantine writer who attempted to give an etymological explanation, and a polemic one, to the name. Such an explanation required a change in the spelling from Saracen to Sarracen. John of Damascus suggested that “Saracen” derives from the name Sarrah and the adjective *κενός* (empty) and as such it applies to “those who were expelled by Sarrah empty,” without grace; that is to the *illegitimate* sons of Abraham. A synonym for Sarracens used by Muslims according to John of Damascus, is the name Hagarenes (the sons of Hagar, Abraham’s concubine, rather than of a legitimate wife) and Ishmaelites (the descendants of Ishmael, the illegitimate son of Abraham)! John of Damascus, *On the Heresies*, in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, P. Bonifatius Kotter (Berlin, 1981), 4, p. 60. See also Daniel, J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 70–71. V. Christides has missed all this evidence when he concludes that “a Byzantine explanation of the origin of Saracen which has escaped the attention of modern scholars is found in the writings of the fifteenth-century Byzantine author Georgios Phrantzes who asserts that the Arabs were called *Sarakenoi* because they were sent out by Sarah devoid of inheritance and empty-handed”; see his, “The names “Ἀραβες, Σαρακηνοί etc. and their false Byzantine etymologies,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65 (1972) 329–33, at 331.

17 The word used here is Ἀμερουμνής, an obvious Hellenization of the Arabic title *Amīr al-mu’minīn*, “Ruler of the Faithful”. The first to assume this title was ‘Umar, the second caliph (634–644). Other Umayyad and subsequently Abbasid caliphs followed his example, as did some rival minor rulers. The title was assumed more frequently by rulers in the West. Since the text specifically calls this *amīr al-mu’minīn* “Emir of Syria,” the reference must be to one of the Umayyad caliphs ruling from Damascus from 661 to 750. The Hellenized title Ἀμερουμνής occurs also in the writing of Arethas of Caesarea (850–932); “To the Emir in Damascus at the request of Romanos the Emperor”; *Arethae Archiepiscopi Caesariensis. Scripta Minora*, ed. L.G. Westerink (Leipzig, 1968), 1, p. 242. On Arethas, see Daniel J. Sahas, “Arethas’s ‘Letter to the Emir at Damascus’: Official or popular views on



of Syria sent his nephew to administer some works under construction in the said castle. In that place there is also a big church, old and splendid, dedicated to Saint, the most glorious martyr, George.<sup>18</sup> When the Sarracen saw the church from a distance he ordered his servants to bring his belongings and the camels themselves, twelve of them, inside the church so that he may be able to supervise them from a high place as they were fed.<sup>19</sup>

[1201B] As for the priests of that venerable church, they pleaded with him saying: “Master, do not do such things; this is a church of God. Do not show disrespect towards it and do not bring the camels inside the holy altar of God.” But the Sarracen, who was pitiless and stubborn, did not want even to listen to the pleas of the presbyters. Instead he said to his servants, in Arabic: “Do you not do what you have been commanded to do?” Immediately his servants did as he commanded them. But suddenly the camels, as they were led into the church, all, by the command of God, fell down dead.<sup>20</sup> When the Sarracen saw the extraordinary miracle he

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Islam in the 10th century Byzantium?” *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 3 (1984) 69–81 (see Chapter 27 in this volume).

- 18 The affection of Muslims for Saint George is a very interesting phenomenon, although not yet thoroughly explained. The Muslim Arabs of the Middle East, especially those who have lived in co-existence with Orthodox Christians, have shown a remarkable reverence for Saint George, the military saint, who is depicted riding a horse and killing the dragon. Perhaps the link between the Muslims and Saint George is Abyssinian Christianity. This pre-Chalcedonian Coptic Church with its many Jewish and Semitic practices (arks, circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, claims of its emperors as being “sons of David and Solomon,” etc.) respects Saint George as its patron saint. Ancient texts indicate that the Ethiopians were partly under Mosaic Law and in part they worshiped the Serpent. No wonder, therefore, that Saint George is a patron saint of Ethiopia; Ninian Smart, *The Phenomenon of Christianity* (London, 1979), p. 60. The encounter of Islam with Abyssinia goes back to the time of Muhammad himself. *The Life of Muhammad* (A translation of Ishāq’s *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, by A. Guillaume [Oxford, 1969]), pp. 146–55. Heroes who defeat superhuman creatures and evil powers seem to have attracted people of various cultures and religious traditions. There is such a hero also in Islam, Abū Zayd, known as Bu Zīd il-Hilālī in Zafar and North Arabia. The Muslim fascination with him is because he defeated a huge monster, plaguing the country, which no one else had managed to contain. For the text of this story with an introduction and commentary, see T.M. Johnstone, “A St. George of Dhofar” *Arabian Studies*, 5 (1978) 59–65.
- 19 The description suggests that the church, being big and splendid, had a balcony usually reserved for women. The Emir occupied this for his private quarters, while he had planned to use the nave as a stable for the camels.
- 20 Theophanes the Chronographer (d. 818) mentions a similar case in which “the camels of the chief minister were burned in the church of Saint Elijah; *Chronographia*, ed. De Boor, 1, 404.14–15. This incident reportedly took place in Caesarea, Cappadocia in the second year of Hisham’s reign, i.e. in 726. Do these similar reports by two independent sources

became ecstatic<sup>21</sup> and ordered his servants to take away the dead camels and throw them away from the church; and they did so.

[1201C] As it was a holiday on that day and the time for the Divine Liturgy was approaching, the priest who was to start the holy service of the preparation of the gifts was very much afraid of the Sarracen; how could he start the bloodless sacrifice in front of him! Another priest, co-communicant to him, said to the priest who was to celebrate the Liturgy: "Do not be afraid. Did you not see the extraordinary miracle? Why are you hesitant?" Thus the said priest, without fear, started the holy service of offering.<sup>22</sup>

The Sarracen noticed all these and waited to see what the priest [1204A] was going to do. The priest began the holy service of offering and took the loaf of bread to prepare the holy sacrifice. But the Sarracen saw that the priest took in his hand a child which he slaughtered, drained the blood inside the cup, cut the body into pieces and placed them on the tray!<sup>23</sup>

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suggest a usual Muslim practice? They perhaps suggest a more hostile attitude toward and treatment of the Christians by the Muslims, uncharacteristic of the earliest Umayyad caliphs. Hishām was the son of 'Abd-al-Malik (684–705), the caliph who initiated hostile measures against the Christians under his rule.

- 21 The expression "to become, or be, ecstatic" occurs frequently and characteristically in this text. It is an expression of a mystical disposition, rather than of an ordinary way of speaking. "Ecstasy," etymologically speaking, is the state of being in which a person is removed from (*ék*) the place on which one "stands" (*στάσις*), to a different state, or "world." It is the state of being transcendent from the empirical world to a higher level of consciousness and spirituality. Ecstasy is the state which a mystic strives to attain in his process towards union with God. Frequency of such expressions and the theme itself of the sermon, which is about a vision, manifest clearly the mystical character of the text. Ecstasy and "ecstatic utterances" (*shat̥hiyyāt*) are also ingredients of Islamic mysticism, documented and defended by the theorists of Sufism. See, for example, the *Kitāb al-Luma'* of *Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj* (d. 988); A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York, 1970), p. 67.
- 22 This service is called *προσκομιδή*, literally meaning "the act of offering" of the gifts. It is the service prior to the Divine Liturgy itself and to the communion service, during which the gifts are prepared. The rites of the *προσκομιδή* commemorate the nativity of Christ, "who, from the first moment of his incarnation, was the Lamb destined to be sacrificed for the sons of men"; D. Sokolof, *A Manual of the Orthodox Church's Divine Services* (Jordanville, N.Y., 1962), p. 62. The subsequent vision of the Saracen seems to support this meaning of the *προσκομιδή*.
- 23 The priest extracts from a loaf of bread small pieces and particles. These various pieces represent Christ himself, the Theotokos, the angels, the apostles, the martyrs, the saints, the living members of the Church and those who have passed away. These pieces of bread are subsequently mixed in the chalice with the wine, consecrated during the Liturgy and offered as communion. Thus, communion in the Orthodox Church is a sacrament of an

The Sarracen seeing these things became furious with anger and, enraged at the priest, he wanted to kill him. When the time of the Great Entrance approached, the Sarracen saw again, and more manifestly, the child cut into four pieces on the tray, his blood in the cup. He became again ecstatic with rage. Towards the end of the Divine Liturgy, as some of the Christians wanted to receive [1204B] Holy Communion and as the priest pronounced the “With the fear of God and with faith draw near,”<sup>24</sup> all the Christians bent their heads in reverence. Some of them went forward to receive the holy sacrament. Again, for a third time, the Sarracen saw that the priest, with a spoon, was offering to the communicants from the body and the blood of the child. The repentant Christians received the holy sacrament. But the Sarracen saw that they had received communion from the body and the blood of the child, and at that he became filled with anger and rage against everybody.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy the priest distributed the *antidoron* to all Christians.<sup>25</sup> He then took off his priestly vestments and offered to the

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existential union between each individual and the entire Church, visible and invisible, past and present, within the body of Christ.

The *προσκομιδή* rites commemorate the Nativity. See note above. The Eucharistic service also, in spite of its predominant paschal character, is closely related to the Nativity as well. John Chrysostom, the modifier of the Divine Liturgy, the one most often celebrated in the Orthodox Church, has identified frequently the altar with a spiritual cradle and the Eucharist with a memorial of Christ’s passion but also with his infancy; thus, the existence of a number of parallel edifying anecdotes and sermons such as this, presenting Christ as an infant being sacrificed physically in the place of elements. For such references, see Christopher Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London, 1982), pp. 209–10.

The tradition of the Christ child standing out from inside the chalice, before dismemberment, surrounded by angels and the Fathers-authors of the Divine Liturgy, has been preserved by the iconography in the theme of *Melismos* (literally, dismemberment). Such an icon can be seen, for example, in a fresco in the niche of the sanctuary in the abbot’s tower at the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon in Thessaly, Greece. See John T.A. Koumoulides, *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monuments at Aghia in Thessaly, Greece: The Art and Architecture of the Monastery of Saint Panteleimon* (London, 1975), pp. 35 and 36, fig. 15 and 15a.

24 The full liturgical invitation to receive communion is: “With the fear of God, with faith, and with love, draw near.”

25 Ἀντίδωρον means that which is offered “instead of the gift.” These are small pieces of bread of the non-consecrated part of the loaf, which the priest distributes at the end of the Liturgy, to those who for whatever reason did not receive Communion. The ἀντίδωρον is not a substitute for the Holy Communion, but a pastoral gesture of the Church acknowledging and, in a way, rewarding the presence of everybody in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Sarracen a piece from the bread.<sup>26</sup> But he said, [1204C] in Arabic: “What is this?” The priest answered: “Master, it is from the bread from which we celebrated the liturgy.” And the Sarracen said angrily: “Did you celebrate the Liturgy from that, you dog, impure, dirty, and killer? Didn’t I see that you took and slaughtered a child, and that you poured his blood into the cup, and mutilated his body and placed on the plate members of his, here and there? Didn’t I see all these, you polluted one, and killer? Didn’t I see you eating and drinking from the body and blood of the child, and that you even offered the same to the attendants? They now have in their mouths pieces of flesh dripping blood.”

When the priest heard this he became ecstatic and said: “Master, [1204D] I am a sinner and unable to see such a mystery. But since your Lordship saw such a mystery I believe in God that you, indeed, are a great man.”

And the Sarracen said: “Is this not what I saw?” And the priest: “Yes, my Lord, this is how it is; but myself, being a sinner, I am not able to see such a mystery, but only bread and wine. Indeed, we believe we hold and we sacrifice this bread and wine as a figuration of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, even the great and marvelous Fathers, the stars and teachers of the [1205A] Church, like the divine Basil the Great, and the memorable Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian, were unable to see this awesome and terrifying mystery. How can I see it?”

When the Sarracen heard this he became ecstatic and he ordered his servants and everybody who was inside to leave the church. He then took the priest by the hand and said: “As I see and as I have heard, great is the faith of the Christians. So, if you so will, Father, baptize me.” And the priest said to the Sarracen: “Master, we believe in and we confess our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to the world for our salvation. We also believe in [1205B] the Holy Trinity, the consubstantial and undivided one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one Godhead. We believe also in Mary, the ever-virgin mother of light, who has given birth to the fruit of life, our pre-announced Lord, Jesus Christ. She was virgin before, virgin during and virgin after giving birth. We believe also that all the holy apostles, prophets, martyrs, saints and righteous men are servants of God. Do you not realize, therefore, my master, that the greatest faith is that of the Orthodox Christians?”

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26 This detail (“he took off his priestly vestments and offered ...”) clarifies the distinction that the Orthodox Church makes between those partaking in communion being members of the one Church, and those participating in a religious service or prayer from differing churches; even with people coming from different religious traditions!

And the Sarracen said again: "I beg you, Father, baptize me." But the priest answered: "Far from that. I cannot do such a thing; for if I do and your nephew<sup>27</sup> the Emir hears of that, he will kill [1205C] me and destroy this church, too.<sup>28</sup> But if it is, indeed, your wish to be baptized, go to that place in the Sinai Mountain. There, there is the bishop; he will baptize you."<sup>29</sup>

The Sarracen prostrated himself in front of the presbyter and walked out of the church. Then, one hour after nightfall, he came back to the

27 At the beginning of the sermon the Sarracen was stated as the nephew of the Emir; PG 100.1201A. See also 1208B and 1208C.

28 Regulating the rights and obligations of Christians, whose cities had fallen under Muslim domination, an early ordinance attributed to 'Umar (although in all probability it belongs to the era of 'Umar II, 717–720) explicitly prohibits the conversion of a Muslim to Christianity: "We will not show off our religion, nor invite any one to embrace it."

The same ordinance prohibits even the repair of any old religious institution, let alone the erection of any new church, monastery or hermitage. It prohibits also the display of crosses and sacred books in the streets and market places where Muslims live; the ringing of bells loudly; religious processions on Palm and Easter Sundays and prayers sung in loud voices near Muslim quarters!

29 The reference here is, obviously, to the Monastery of the Transfiguration, known as the Monastery of Saint Catherine, in Sinai. This monastery erected as a monastery-fortress during the reign of Justinian (527–565) encompassed older hermitages going back to the early fourth century and to Empress Helen, the mother of the first Roman Christian Emperor Constantine (324–337). By a Justinian law (PG 86.1149) respected until today, the abbot of the monastery holds the office of the bishop with the title of "Archbishop." The monastery had in its possession also a number of *metochia*, or dependencies. These were scattered throughout the Sinai Peninsula, Cairo, Gaza, in various parts of Syria, Crete, the mainland Greece, and possibly in Rumania and Russia. Some of these *metochia* are still in existence and active. The history of the monastery, famous for its wealth in icons, manuscripts, including the Codex Sinaiticus (now in the British Museum) and for its long tradition in monastic spirituality, is one of the most fascinating places and examples of Muslim-Eastern Christian relations. Bedouin Muslims are still surrounding the monastery serving as guardians. They hold the authority of the Christian archbishop in high respect, demonstrate their devotion to Christian saints, especially to Saint Catherine and to Saint George, and defend their allegiance to the monastery; a strange type of "citizenship" which remains unaffected by the shifting national borders between Israel and Egypt in recent years! For a brief excursus through the history of the monastery, see K. Amantos, *Σύντομος Ἱστορία τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Σινᾶ* (Thessalonike, 1953); Evangelos Papaioannou, *The Monastery of St. Catherine* (Athens, 1976); George H. Forsyth and K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, 1973).

The monks still today show an Arabic manuscript, which they claim to be an ordinance written by Muhammad himself, ordering the Muslims to preserve the inviolability of the monastery.

The words of the priest in this story seem to confirm an early tradition giving immunity to the monastery of Sinai from any interference of the Islamic state.

priest, took off his royal golden clothes, put on a poor sack of wool,<sup>30</sup> and he left in secret by night. He walked to Mount Sinai and there he received the holy baptism from the bishop.

He also learned from the Psalter, and he recited verses from it every day.<sup>31</sup>

[1205D] One day three years later he [the former Sarracen] said to the bishop: “Forgive me, Master, what am I supposed to do in order to see Christ?” And the bishop said: “Pray with the right faith and one of these days you will see Christ, according to your wish.”<sup>32</sup> But the former Sarracen said again: “Master, give me your consent to go to the priest who offered me instruction when I saw the awesome vision in the church of the most glorious martyr George.”<sup>33</sup> The bishop said: “Go, in peace.”

[1208A] Thus he went to the priest, prostrated himself in front of him, embraced him and said to him: “Do you know, Father, who I am?” And the priest: “How can I recognize a man whom I have never seen before?” But, again, the former Sarracen said: “Am I not the nephew of the Emir, who

30 This was the characteristic garment of Christian ascetics. One of the explanations given to the name *ṣūfi* for a Muslim mystic is that this is a derivative of the word *ṣūf* (wool); thus the name *ṣūfi* is related to Muslim ascetics being influenced by their Christian counterparts wearing woolen clothes. That such a practice was prevalent in early Islam is evident by the debate on the appropriateness of such a gown between two contemporary Muslims. The ascetic Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.110/728) justified the woolen gown of the ascetics as an act of imitation of such prophets as Jesus and David, while Ibn Sirin (d.110/728) condemned it as being contrary to the tradition of the Prophet “who clothed himself in cotton!” Arberry, *Sufism*, p. 35.

31 See below, footnotes 37–39.

32 The definite answer of the abbot and its emphasis on *prayer* betrays, perhaps, a direct influence on him by John Klimakos, a mystic of the Christian East. John (+ ca. 649) is the well-known abbot of the Monastery of Sinai and the author of the spiritual writing *The Ladder* (in Greek, Κλίμαξ) after which he was surnamed. The text of *The Ladder of Paradise*, in PG 88.631–1210; trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (New York, 1982). John of the Ladder is a major “witness of monastic spirituality based upon the invocation of the ‘name of Jesus.’” John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology, Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, 1979), p. 70. Most likely the “prayer of the heart,” as the prayer of Jesus is otherwise called, was already practiced in Sinai prior to John of the Ladder. The invocation of the name of Jesus or the “Jesus prayer” (“Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me the sinner”) is a kind of *dhikr*, aiming at concentrating the mind, collecting it from wandering around and bringing about an experience of and a union with the divine presence. As taught by John of the Ladder, the Jesus prayer was not meant to be an exercise of the mind alone, but one of the whole human existence, recalling and sharing in the experience of the transfigured Christ.

33 Does the request reflect, perhaps, a dissatisfaction of a novice monk with the contemplative hesychastic practices at Sinai and his search for a more immediate and direct spiritual experience?

brought the camels inside the church and they all died, and who during the Divine Liturgy saw that terrifying vision?" When the priest looked at him he was amazed and praised God seeing that the former Arab wolf had become a most calm sheep of Christ. He embraced him with passion and invited him to his cell to eat bread.

And the former Sarracen said: "Forgive me, Master and Father, but I want and have a desire to see Christ. How can I do that?" [1208B] And the priest said: "If you wish to see Christ go to your nephew<sup>34</sup> and preach Christ to him. Curse and anathematize the faith of the Sarracens and their false prophet Muhammad and preach correctly the true faith of the Christians without fear, and thus you will see Christ."<sup>35</sup>

[1208C] The former Sarracen left in earnest. By night he was knocking at the door of the Sarracen forcefully. The guards at the gate of the house of the Emir asked: "Who is yelling and knocking at the door?" And he answered: "I am the nephew of the Emir who left some time ago and was lost. Now I want to see my nephew<sup>36</sup> and tell him something." The guards of the gate conveyed this to the Sarracen immediately: "Master, it is your nephew who left some time ago and was lost." The Emir, leaving a sigh, said: "Where is he?" They said: "At the gate of the palace." He then ordered his servants to go and meet him with lights and candles. They all did as the king, Emir, commanded and they took the monk, the former Sarracen by the hand and presented him to the Emir, his nephew.

When the Emir saw him, he was very glad. He embraced him with tears in his eyes and said to him: "What is this? Where were [1208D] you living all this time? Aren't you my nephew?" And the monk said: "Don't you recognize me, your nephew? Now, as you see, by the grace of God the Most High I have become a Christian and a monk. I have been living in desert places so that I may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. I hope in the unspeakable compassion of the All-Sovereign God to inherit his

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34 The priest continues treating the Sarracen as the uncle, instead of the nephew of the Emir! See above n. 27 and below n. 36.

35 In reality the priest is inviting the convert to become a martyr! After all monasticism, as viewed by the early Christian East, is a form of "dying" (*martyrdom*) for the world and of offering a *witness* (in Greek, *μαρτυρία*), to the world – two sides of the same coin in imitation of Christ. Earliest ascetics saw monasticism as an alternative to martyrdom where martyrdom, coming from persecution by a pagan State, was not possible. Thus, while ascetics sought to experience a union with Christ in the flesh, martyrs sought to achieve a union with Christ in spite of the flesh.

36 What is becoming evident here is that either there is a confusion in the terms, or an uncle and a nephew are both called in relationship to each other "nephew." The word "uncle" occurs nowhere in the text; see above notes 27 and 34.

kingdom. Why are you hesitating yourself, too, Emir? Receive the holy baptism of the Orthodox Christians in order to inherit eternal life, as I hope to do.”

The Emir laughed, scratched his head and said: “What are you chattering about, you miserable one; what are you chattering? What has happened to you? Alas, you pitiful one! How did you abandon [1209A] your life and the scepters of reign and roam around as a beggar, dressed in these filthy clothes made of hair?”

The monk responded to him: “By the grace of God. As far as all the things I used to have when I was a Sarracen, these were [material] property and were of the devil. But these things that you see me wearing are a glory and pride, and an engagement with the future and eternal life. I anathematize the religion of the Sarracens and their false prophet.”

Then the Emir said: “Take him out, for he does not know what he is chattering about.” They took him away and put him in a place in the palace where they gave him food and drink. And he spent three days there, but he took neither food nor drink. He was pray-[1209B] ing to God earnestly and with faith. Going down to his knees he said: “O Lord, I have hoped in thee; let me never be ashamed,<sup>37</sup> neither let mine enemies laugh at me to scorn.”<sup>38</sup> And again: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.”<sup>39</sup> And again: “Enlighten my eyes, Lord God, that I may not fall asleep into death; that my enemy may never say ‘I have overpowered him.’ ‘Strengthen my heart, O Lord,’ so that I may be able to fight the visible deceiver, the Sarracen; so that the evil devil may not stamp on me and make me fear death, for your holy name.” He then made the sign of the cross and said: “The Lord is my enlightenment and [1209C] my savior. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life. From whom will I hesitate?” And again he cried out to the Emir: “Receive holy baptism in order to gain the immeasurable kingdom of God.”

Again the Emir gave orders for him to be brought in front of him. He had prepared for him clothes exceedingly beautiful. And the Emir spoke: “Enjoy, you pitiful one, enjoy and rejoice for being a king. Do not disdain your life and your youth which is so beautiful, walking instead mindlessly like a beggar and a penniless one. Alas you pitiful one. What do you think?”

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37 Ps. 30 (31) 1; 70 (71) 1.

38 Ps. 24 (25) 2.

39 Ps. 50 (51) 1.



The monk laughed and replied to the Emir: “Do not weep at what I have in mind. I am thinking of how to be able to fulfil the [1209D] work of my Christ and that of the Father priest who has sent me, and has been my teacher. As far as the clothes you have prepared for me, sell them and give the money to the poor. You, too, should abandon the temporary scepters of the reign, so that you may receive scepters of an eternal life. Do not rest your hope on things of the present but on things which are of the future, and do not believe in the pseudo-prophet Muhammad, the impure, the detestable one, the son of hell. Believe, rather, in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the crucified one. Believe that the one Godhead is a consubstantial Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a Trinity of the same essence, and undivided.”

The Emir laughed again and said to the officials who had [1212A] gathered in the palace: “This man is mindless. What shall we do with him? Take him out and expel him.” Those, however, sitting by the king said: “He meant to desecrate and corrupt the religion of the Sarracens. Do you not hear how he curses and anathematizes our great prophet?”

The monk and former Sarracen cried out loudly: “I feel sorry for you Emir because you, unfortunate one, do not want to be saved. Believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified one, and anathematize the religion of the Sarracens and their false prophet, as I did.”

And the Sarracen Emir said: “Take him out as I am ordering [1212B] you. He is mindless and does not know what he is talking about.”

Those sitting by with him said: “Well, you heard that he anathematized the religion of the Sarracens and that he is blaspheming against the great prophet, and you say, ‘He does not know what he is talking about?’ If you do not have him killed we will also go and become Christians.”

And the Emir said: “I cannot have him killed because he is my nephew and I feel sorry for him. But you take him and do as you please.”

And they got hold of the monk with great anger, they dragged [1212C] him out of the palace and submitted him to many tortures trying to make him return to the previous religion of the Sarracens. But he did not. Instead he was teaching everybody in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to believe and be saved.

The Sarracens dragged him out of the city and there they stoned him to death,<sup>40</sup> this most pious monk, whose name was Pachomios.

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40 Denouncing Islam (*ridda*, apostasy) has traditionally been met in Islam with the death penalty. The practice goes back to Abū Bakr the first caliph (632–634) who brought the tribes, which apostatized after the death of Muhammad, by force back to the central

On that night a star came down from heaven and rested on top of the most pious martyr, and everybody was able to see it for forty days;<sup>41</sup> and many of them became believers.

With the prayers of the most blessed martyr, of the all-pure [1212D] Mother of God Mary, who is ever-virgin, and of all the saints; for the remission of our sins. Amen.

### Summary of Remarks

The story is attractive, imaginative and with a characteristic Oriental plot. It is motivated by monastic ideals and a desire to witness to one's faith boldly, making converts to the Christian faith, becoming a martyr for one's faith and being united with Christ as imminently as possible. If the text does not prove the historicity of the episode, it does ascertain the historical reality of its time. Thus, the story allows us to make the following observations:

1. The whole incident rides on the miraculous and mystical; elements which lie at the heart of monastic spirituality. Preoccupied by these ideals, the author does not seem particularly concerned about certain inconsistencies which his story contains. For example, while the priest is once depicted reserved, even afraid, of the Emir, not daring to even baptize the Saracen, later the same priest urges the convert to preach directly to the Emir, to curse and anathematize Muhammad in front of him! Also, while the author portrays the priest as being modest, humble and convincing in front of the Saracen prince, he portrays the convert monk as arrogant and combative. Finally, the Emir himself appears as being good-hearted and compassionate, while the monk (nephew) appears intransigent and confrontational.

2. The story is a good example of a meaningful interfaith "dialogue" in words and action, but a bad example of martyrdom! The earliest Church did not reward cases of martyrdom which resulted from open and unwarranted

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authority of Medina. See also Fazlur Rahman, "The Law of Rebellion in Islam," in *Islam in the Modern World* (1983 Paine Lectures in Religion, the University of Missouri-Columbia, 1983), pp. 1–10, at 1–2. Most neo-martyrs of the Orthodox Church were actually converts to Christianity from Islam, or crypto-Christians. On the neo-martyrs, see R.M. Dawkins, "The crypto-Christians of Turkey," *Byzantion* 8 (1933) 247–75; N. Russell, "Neomartyrs of the Greek Calendar," *Sobornost* 5 (1983) 36–62; Demetrios J. Constantelos, "The Neomartyrs as Evidence for Methods and Motives Leading to Conversion and Martyrdom in the Ottoman Empire," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 23 (1978) 216–31.

41 Since the word "star" and "martyr" in Greek are, grammatically, of masculine gender, the text makes it unclear whether "everyone was able to see *him*" (the martyr), or "*it*" (the star)!

provocations. This story – if it reflects a historical reality – tends to suggest that later Christendom condoned and perhaps encouraged such cases of martyrdom; a sign of a Church growing tired of, and intolerant towards, Islam.

The vision itself, which should be taken as the focal point of the sermon, signifies the importance of worship in general, and of the liturgy in particular, as a means of an interfaith encounter in experience and action, rather than in words by themselves. Verbal encounters alone can, as in this particular story, easily deteriorate into polemics.

3. The central and surprising figure in the story is the Saracen prince. He is able to see with his eyes what a Christian believes in his heart, but is unable to see. The Saracen appears to be a mystic by disposition, one of those who flee the secularism and the luxuries of the Umayyad court at Damascus. His example seems to represent the trend of the earliest Muslim ascetics; a trend which gave rise to Sufism. Thus, the story fits well with the extravagant Umayyad administration and the emergence of Islamic asceticism.

The prince converts to Christianity easily. He goes to Sinai without hesitation, where he becomes a disciplined and accomplished monk. He demonstrates a particular passion for mystical, hesychastic experiences. He wants to “see Christ,” immediately. This is what he felt was missing from Sinai. He was not even reluctant to die in order to be able to see Christ! The early mystics of Islam also had set for themselves a similar goal: transmutation in God even by the extinction (*fanā*) of their own self or individuality; an insult to the orthodox Islamic doctrine and sensibility. This clash between orthodox Islam and mysticism reached its culmination in al-Junayd (d. 910) and especially in the case of his celebrated contemporary al-Ḥallāj. The latter was executed on the cross (d. 922) for claiming “*ana ’l-ḥaqq*” (“I am the truth”) after having achieved a mystical union with God.

4. All external and internal indications point to a text which reflects life in the eighth century, rather than in late medieval times. Not all evidences are of the same value but, collectively, they present a rather convincing case:

- a) The name of the author is clearly stated as Gregory Dekapolites, a figure well-identified (780/790–842) whose life has been narrated by a contemporary and well-known biographer, Ignatius (780–?).
- b) The caliph is called *Amīr al-muʾminīn* an earliest title introduced by ‘Umar, the second caliph (634–644), and preserved by the Umayyads and the ‘Abbasid caliphs. Furthermore, the text calls this emir *Amīr al-muʾminīn* “of Syria.” This designation suggests an Umayyad caliph governing from Damascus.
- c) With regard to the relations between Muslims and Christians, the text seems to imply the terms of the “Ordinance of ‘Umar.” The Christian

priest refrains from baptizing the Saracen because such an act could have resulted in death for himself and in destruction of the church. The Church of Saint George is in the hands of Christians for purposes of worship, although the Muslim prince easily takes the liberty of invading and occupying it; an allusion to a hardening position of later Caliphs compared to the earliest Umayyads. The text depicts an atmosphere of co-existence between the two religious communities, with the Christians being the subordinate and protected community (*dhimmi*s). The Saracen prince is put to death, not for being a Christian but for having apostatized from Islam and for blaspheming Muḥammad. There is no indication, however, that either the Sinaitic bishop who baptized him or the priest who instructed him was punished for his actions.

5. The text is, of course, an hagiological sermon. Its purpose is to praise the virtues, the faith and the self-renunciation of the martyr. However, the central event of the story and the catalyst to the process of the hero's conversion and his ultimate martyrdom is a vision! This vision obviously has a Eucharistic content. But considered in this particular historical context, the scope of the sermon and the meaning of the vision go beyond that. In the context of the Iconoclastic controversy the iconoclasts maintained that the only icon of Christ that the Church knows is the Eucharist, rather than painted icons made by human hands. The one who articulated this thesis was none other than the theologically-inclined iconoclast Emperor Constantine V the Kopronymus (741–775) who made this thesis the subject of one of his pointed and provocative theological "Inquiries" (*Peūseis*). These "Inquiries" became the backbone of the theology adopted by the Iconoclastic Council of Constantinople (754).<sup>42</sup> For the iconophiles, however, the perception of the Eucharist as the "icon" of Christ, or Christ's own body "by participation and convention," is tantamount to blasphemy. For the iconophiles the Eucharist is an act established by Christ himself who offered the bread as "his own [*my*] body," not as an icon of his body, and the cup as "his own [*my*] blood" not as an icon of his blood. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 787), which refuted the iconoclastic Definition of the Council of 754, on this particular Eucharistic argument of the iconoclasts, states the following: "Thus, it has been clearly demonstrated that nowhere did either the Lord, or the Apostles, or the Fathers call the bloodless sacrifice offered through the priest "an icon," but rather they called it "this

42 On the *Peūseis* of Emperor Constantine, and on the Eucharistic theology in the context of iconoclasm, see Stephen Gero, "Notes on Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Eighth Century," *Byzantion* 44 (1974) 23–42, and his "The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and its Sources," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975) 4–22.

very body” and “this very blood.”<sup>43</sup> Is it not the story of the sermon, a narrative depicting precisely the wording and the spirit of this Orthodox (and iconophile) Eucharistic theology? Knowing Gregory Dekapolites as a theologically ardent iconophile monk who left the contemplative and ascetic life in order to fight against iconoclasm and support the iconophiles, one has little difficulty in accepting this story as a sermon on the iconophile Eucharistic theology. Perhaps the *Sermon* as a whole is iconophile apologetics: the fact that even a Muslim, guided by the providence of God, is able to see the stark ontological reality of the Eucharist, represents a judgment against the *Christian iconoclasts*, and it exposes their effort at diluting the sacrament into a mere “image,” or icon, of Christ in the place of a real sacrifice!

6. If there is no compelling reason to question the authorship of the text as being indeed “a historical sermon of Gregory Dekapolites,” who is, then, this *amīr-al-muʿminīn* of Syria? The text offers us little evidence with which to determine the possible historical figures implicated in the sermon. Of various possible caliphs two seem to be the more probable ones, ‘Umar II (717–720), and Hishām (724–743). ‘Umar II, (the fifth caliph), was the son of ‘Abd al-Azīz who served as governor of al-Ḥulwān in Egypt in 61 or 63 A.H. ‘Umar himself was born in Egypt.<sup>44</sup> As Süyūṭī describes ‘Umar II as a man of “justice, removing grievances and establishing good laws”:<sup>45</sup> The people addressed him as “amīr al-muʿminīn,” and ‘Umar himself assumed this title. The relationship of ‘Umar to Egypt, his title, as well as the above stated traits of his personality are characteristics congenial to the information provided by the text.

Another possible case is Hishām (724–743). Theophanes, the Chronographer, himself an iconophile like Gregory, who died in exile as a confessor for his faith, reports that after the death of Yazīd (Yazīd II 720–724) Hishām, the latter’s brother, became emir “and he started building in every country and city palaces, making plantations and gardens, and extracting water.”<sup>46</sup> This piece of information corroborates the information regarding the building of a castle in Kurūm.

Incidents of desecration of churches were attributed to iconoclasts, as well as to Muslim officials whom the iconophile writers considered as forerunners

43 G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (Florence, 1867), 13, 265B. For the texts of the iconoclastic Definition of 754, its Refutation and the iconophile Definition of 787 in translation, see Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos. Sources in the Eighth-century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986).

44 On ‘Umar, see Jalaluʿddin As Süyūṭī, *History of the Caliphs*, trans. H.S. Jargett (Amsterdam, 1970) pp. 233–49.

45 *Ibid.* p. 235.

46 *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 1,403,24–27.

and instigators of the Christian iconoclasm.<sup>47</sup> The incident that Theophanes mentions and the dates of Hishām's reign coincide with the violent iconoclastic actions of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III "the Isaurian" (717–741). The sermon of Gregory Dekapolites, therefore, might also be a product of the same turbulent period.

The questions of locality of the village or town of Kurūm,<sup>48</sup> the castle in this town, the identity of the *strategos* and especially the name of the Muslim caliph remain still open questions. Less obscure questions, however, seem to be the period and the context of the text: the writing presupposes an iconoclastic climate and an iconophile author; it reflects early Muslim-Christian relations; it betrays the growing anti-Christian policies of the later Umayyads, and it points to the rising Muslim discontent with a secularized caliphate.

However, beyond the historical and theological information and implications of the text, the text in itself and its content seem to contain a moral: "dialogue" in the context, or through the means, of worship, existential religious experience and mysticism – that is, meeting of hearts within the context of a mutual encounter with the divine – does bear fruit. Irrespective even of the question of whether the text is authentic or not, the fact remains that such a text *has found* a place in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature! Among so many other pieces of anti-Islamic literature, such as refutations, formulas of abjuration, decrees, heresiological writings, responses, dialogues and condemnations, here is a short writing which is a "story"; something less encephalic and more experiential and miraculous. It is this fact which compels us to notice it as a suggestion of another kind of Muslim-Christian encounters; at least, as a possibility.

This text, as a piece of spiritual literature of Christianity, points to a significant trait in the attitude of the Christian East towards Islam, and, by extension, towards other non-Christian religious traditions: that *it is possible* for an "infidel" to see things that a faithful has been accustomed to believe but unable to experience; and that these things are not simply "things" but the very essence, the core and the mystery of Christianity. Once such a possibility has been acknowledged, a major breakthrough has been accomplished. Then an interfaith encounter can be lifted up to a level of relationship, higher than merely polemics.

47 On the bibliography referring to Islam and Byzantine iconoclasm see Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 10–13; and *Idem.*, *Icon and Logos*, pp. 18–21.

48 Neither this name, nor its Greek translation, Ampelos, appear in Theophanes.

## Ritual of Conversion from Islam to the Byzantine Church

A short Greek writing entitled “Τάξις γινομένη ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιστρέφουσι πρὸς τὴν καθαρὰν καὶ ἀληθῆ πίστιν ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν” (“Order followed for those of the Saracens who return to the pure and true faith of us Christians”)<sup>1</sup> is attributed to Nicetas Choniates (ca. 1155–ca. 1215/6) the prominent civil servant of the Comnenian era. The Order has become known in Western scholarship as “Formula of abjuration”. Indeed, the text is taken almost entirely by the ἀπόταξις (literally “stepping aside”, or renunciation) from the faith and practice of Islam, in the form of anathemas.<sup>2</sup> These anathemas are followed by a brief positive statement of the convert’s σύνταξις, or “siding with” Orthodox Christianity. The text has received special notice because of the last anathema “accursed let be the God of Muhammad, of whom he [Muhammad] says that he is one God, δλόσφυρος [lit. made of solid metal beaten to a spherical shape], who neither begat nor was begotten, and no-one has been made like him”.<sup>3</sup> The peculiar wording of this anathema has obviously in mind (if it is not a translation of) *Sūrat al-Tawhīd*, or “The Unity”, the Qur’ānic sūrah which proclaims the unity of God along with an implicit condemnation of the belief in a “Son” of God.

The anathema has obviously been inspired by the misunderstood Qur’ānic word *samad* meaning “the uncompounded one”, and by its polemic manipulation which can be attributed to Nicetas of Byzantium (842–912), the “philosopher”, one of the most extreme Byzantine polemicists of Islam. The “scandalous” anathema itself, as Emperor Manuel I Comnenos (1143–1180) saw

1 PG 140:124A–136C. Subsequently referred to as *Order*. The text in the *Patrologia Graeca* is from F. Sylburg’s edition, *Saracenicæ sive Moamethicæ opera Friderici Sylburgii*, vet. ope bibliothecae palatinae. (Heidelberg, 1595), pp. 74–91.

2 Ed. Montet has published a critical edition of the twenty anathemas against Islam, i.e. the “ἀπόταξις, on the basis of three mss (*Palatinus* 233 (P) of the 14th c., *Vindobonensis* 306(v) also of the 14th c., and *Bruxellensis* (B) dated March 1st 1281), collated by Franz Cumont. These mss contain also similar “formulas of abjuration” of Judaism and Manichaeism. Cf. “Un rituel d’abjuration des musulmans dans l’église grecque”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 53 (1906), 145–163, at 145; text, pp. 148–155.

3 PG 140:133A.

it, as well as his desire “to placate the Muslims”;<sup>4</sup> prompted him to demand its deletion from the master *Catechesis* of Hagia Sophia and from all the catechetical books of the Church. His demand was met with an opposition from the Constantinopolitan synod of bishops during the last year of the Emperor’s life (1180).<sup>5</sup> The anathema was finally modified to read “anathema to Muhammad and all his teachings”, or “let Muhammad be accursed ...”. However, Choniates’ version of the anathema, and possibly all other versions, remained unchanged; a sign that the uncompromising side in the debate prevailed.

Obviously this *Order* was not authored by Nicetas himself, as Manuel blamed “former emperors and members of the hierarchy [as] thoroughly upbraided for being so stupid and thoughtless as to suffer the true God to be placed under anathema”.<sup>6</sup> The date of this *Order* may be even placed as far back as in the middle of the ninth century,<sup>7</sup> if not in the end of the eighth century, the time when the veneration of the icons became a confirmed doctrine and practice of the Church.<sup>8</sup> “Formulas of abjuration” of Judaism and Manichaeism and, therefore, possibly of Islam as well, are dated in the end of the ninth century, during the Patriarchate of Photius (858, 867, 877–886).<sup>9</sup>

4 Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1982), p. 148.

5 With the development of the ὀλόσφυρος and the twelfth-century controversy we have dealt in some detail in, “Holosphynos? A Byzantine Perception of ‘the God of Muhammad’”. Christian-Muslim Encounter. A Conference Sponsored by Hartford Seminary, June 1990 (see Chapter 25 in this volume). The source of the controversy is Nicetas’ History. Cf. *Nicetae Choniatae. Historia*. Recensuit Ioannes Aloysius van Dieten, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, vol. 11/1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975) pp. 213–222; transl. *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, by Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), pp. 121–125; subsequently referred to as Nicetas’ *Historia*. The two numbers indicate the page in von Dieten’s edition and in Magoulias’ translation, whenever this translation has been preferred. The controversy has been recorded also by other chroniclers. Cf. the *Σύνοψις Χρονική* by an anonymous author, ed. N.K. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. VII, pp. 303–307; and Dositheos Notaras, *Παραλειπόμενα ἐκ τῆς Ἱστορίας περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις Πατριαρχευσάντων*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, vol. I [1891 (Bruxelles, 1963)] 247–249.

6 Nicetas, *Historia*, 214/121. The emphasis is ours.

7 Sylburg dates the text to the year 1152, and Cumont cites reasons why its date may be even much earlier. Franz Cumont, “Une formule grecque de renonciation au Judaïsme”, in *Bormannheft der Wiener Studien* (xxiv Jahrg, 2., Heft), pp. 233–234; cf. Mondet “Un rituel”, p. 146, n.1.

8 Montet, “Un rituel”, pp. 146–7.

9 Cf. Brinkmann, *Die Theosophie des Aristokritos* (Rhein. Mus. LI), 1896, p. 273; and Franz Cumont, “La conversion des Juifs byzantins au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle” *Revue de l’instruction publique en Belgique* XLVI (1903) 8–15.



The structure and content of this *Order* of conversion, or reconversion, from Islam to the Church reveal a process of development, resulting in a formal procedure. However, such a uniform and widely used text of abjuration presupposes widespread and frequent conversions from Islam to Christianity. This was not the order of the day in the eighth or early ninth century, except toward the end of the ninth and especially during the tenth century, after the Byzantines had scored some significant victories over the Arabs and had reclaimed some of the former Byzantine territories.

Nicetas' version of the ritual of conversion allows us to reconstruct the process by which one was admitted, or re-admitted to the Church. As it stands, this particular text does not compel us to assume, conclusively, that this *Order* is for those who become Christians for the first time, or for those who reconvert to the Church after they had apostasized. Its descriptive title, speaking of those "who return" to the Christian faith, as well as the fact that the text ends with the entrance of the initiate to the rank of the catechumens,<sup>10</sup> suggests that this *Order* may have been devised for reconverts. However, other aspects of its content suggest the opposite. The process of the ritual of conversion seems to include four stages:

The first stage consists of a two-week period of fasting, clearly as a way of penance and spiritual preparation. During this period the initiate is taught the Lord's prayer and the Creed as a minimum, but most essential, knowledge of the Christian faith; the former as a practical tool for prayer, and the latter as a succinct summary of the Orthodox doctrine.

The second stage begins two weeks later. The initiate is brought in front of the baptistry in the presence of other faithful (acting perhaps as witnesses) and of the priest who is fully vested in his priestly vestments. This is potentially a significant detail. During the service of induction to the rank of the catechumens the normal practice is that the priest does not wear his full set of vestments. He does change, however, into a full set of white vestments for the sacrament of baptism.<sup>11</sup> So does he for the sacrament of marriage; indicative of the eucharistic character of these sacraments, which in the early Church were taking place during the liturgy. This information from the *Order* that the priest is fully vested points either to an earlier and different practice, or

10 PG 140:124B. To the *Order* Sylburg appends the service of the catechumens, and the process of induction that is chrismation, communion, fasting and final wash (*ἀπόλουσις*), from the *Euchologium patriarchale*, PG 140:123–6, Note (3).

11 *Εὐχολόγιον τῶ Μέγα*, ed. Sp. Zervos (reprint of the second edition, Venice 1862, Athens, 1970) p. 136.

to the importance which the Church gave to conversion, or reconversion. Or, again, this detail may suggest that this *Order* was for reconverts reaffirming their baptism.

The initiate makes then in front of the baptistry a public declaration that he, or she, embraces Christianity “not as a result of compulsion, pressure, deceit or hypocrisy,<sup>12</sup> but wholeheartedly, and with a pure and innocent heart and soul that loves Christ and his faith”. The initiate makes also the declaration that with his conversion he is severing himself from the religion of the Saracens, and anathematizes Islam in all its doctrines, beliefs and practices. This long list of anathemas provides us with a most interesting picture of the perception that the Byzantine Church had of Islam at the time as well as of the things which the Church considered to be abominable and objectionable. The *Order* instructs that this declaration of intention and the anathemas must be recited, phrase by phrase, by the priest and be repeated or consented upon by the initiate, or by, or through, an interpreter “if he [the initiate] happens to speak no Greek”; or by the God-parent, if the initiate happens to be a child.<sup>13</sup> One may wonder, how much a convert was able always to understand what he was renouncing and anathematizing!

The recitation of the anathemas was followed by petitions and prayers, as the *Order* has the deacon saying “Let us pray to the Lord” to which the people responded with the “Lord have mercy”, followed by other standard liturgical components.<sup>14</sup> After the “Amen” the priest sealed the initiate. This could be a blessing and sealing of the initiate with the sign of the cross, or something similar, rather than the sacrament of chrismation, since no baptism had yet taken place.<sup>15</sup> With this act the second stage of conversion was completed, and the person “from the next day is numbered among the catechumens”.<sup>16</sup>

The *Order* does not clarify whether baptism followed immediately after this service. In fact, its particular wording suggests that baptism was taking place at a later time. The Patriarchal Euchologion specifies that the catechumens must fast for ten or fifteen days and occupy themselves with prayers morning and evening, learning hymns.<sup>17</sup> The third stage, therefore, seems to be the period of catechesis itself, during which the person is instructed on matters

12 PG 140:124A. The language here may imply real circumstances. Compare this to the Muslim preconditions of making the *shahādah*. Cf. below, n. 53.

13 PG 140:124B.

14 “καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς”. PG 140:124B.

15 Cf. *Euchologium patriarchale*, PG 140:126C (Note).

16 PG 140:124B.

17 PG 140:125B.

of faith and practice and is prepared for baptism. Baptism, then, and christmation constitute the fourth and final stage of a convert's incorporation into the Church. This is the procedure suggested, although not fully articulated, by Nicetas' version of the *Order*.<sup>18</sup>

One other source of information on a similar ritual is the *Διάταξις*, or *Ἀκολουθία* (Order of Service) of Methodius, the iconophile confessor Patriarch of Constantinople (843–7), entitled “Ἀκολουθία περί τῶν ἀπ’ ἀρνήσεως διαφόρων προσώπων καὶ ἡλικιῶν, πρὸς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον καὶ ἀληθῆ πίστιν ἐπιστρεφόντων” (“Order about those various persons and ages who have denounced and are returning to the Orthodox and true faith”).<sup>19</sup> Although the title of this service speaks of “various persons and ages” and does not specify these persons, it is reasonable to assume that at the time of Methodios such persons more so than pagans, Jews, or Manichaeans were Muslims, and the religion in favour of which had denounced their Christian faith was Islam. One can also assume that the Church was more familiar with Christian people who had once converted to Islam and then returned to Christianity, rather than with Muslims directly converting to Christianity. With its phenomenal expansion during the first one and a half century after the death of Muhammad, Islam had had the upper hand over the Byzantines whose territories and Christian population he had subjugated. Conversions, mainly for social and economic reasons, were taking place from Christianity to Islam, rather than the other way. Also Islam treated apostasy as a capital offence. Not only in *dār al-harb* (the land of war, or contested territories), but even in the *dār al-islām* (the land governed by Islam), Muslims preferred to live in areas where Muslims were the majority and Muslim law prevailed, separately from “infidels”, in order to avoid any possible temptation to apostasize.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, reconversion of Islamized persons to Christianity was desirable and, indeed, actively pursued by the Byzantine Church as, for example, the later missionary activities of St. Nikon

18 Cf. also Jean Ebersolt, “Un nouveau manuscrit sur le rituel d’abjuration des musulmans dans l’Église grecque”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 53(1906)231–232.

19 Jacobus Goar, *Euchologion sive rituale Graecorum* (Graz, 1960; reprinted from the second edition, Venice 1730), pp. 689–692; hereafter referred to as *Ἀκολουθία*. PG 100: 1299–1325, with comments by Goar. The same order also, in Alexander Cangelarius ed., *Εὐχολόγιον* (1740), pp. 373–7; and in Sp. Zervos ed., *Εὐχολόγιον τὸ Μέγα* (Venice, 1851), pp. 588–94.

20 Cf. Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982), p. 67. Cf. also a number of studies on the subject of conversion in Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi eds., *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), especially those by Richard W. Bulliet, “Conversion Stories in Early Islam”, pp. 123–133, and Michael G. Morony, “The Age of Conversion: A Reassessment”, pp. 135–150.

the “Metanoieite” (d. 998) among the Cretans, after the reconquest of Crete from the Arabs (961) indicate.<sup>21</sup>

Methodios of Constantinople outlines different procedures for readmission to the Church for three different categories of reconverts:

The first category includes children, who were captured and had denounced their faith out of fear, naiveté or ignorance. For such children Methodios prescribes prayers for seven days. On the eighth day the children are to be washed, chrismated and given a set of new clothes, as newly baptized, without however being re-baptized.<sup>22</sup>

The second category includes young or older people, who had denounced their faith under torture. Such persons should fast “for two Lents”;<sup>23</sup> during which they should offer prayers and perform prostrations. Close to the end of the two Lents prayers are to be offered for eight days, while the converts should repeat the “*Κύριε ἐλέησον*” (“Lord have mercy”) one hundred times a day. Then they are to be washed, chrismated and given communion, as those who have been baptized. They too, however, ought not to be re-baptized.

The third category includes those who had become renegades willingly. These are to be received back, but not to be allowed to receive communion ever, except at the end of their life, according to the 73rd canon of St. Basil.<sup>24</sup>

Those returning to the Church were received, “in the order of those who are baptized”<sup>25</sup> or, according to codex Barberinus, “in the order which has been established for the newly illuminated ones”,<sup>26</sup> by being given a new set of

21 *The Life of Saint Nikon*. Text, Translation and Commentary by Denis F. Sullivan (Brookline, MA.: Hellenic College Press, 1987), where further bibliography on the subject. Cf. also Vasilios Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824). A Turning point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens: 1984).

22 In the *Εὐχολόγιον* there is a brief prayer “*Ἐπὶ ἀποστάντι ἐκ παιδιόθεν, ἤγγουν μαγαρίσαντι, καὶ μετανοοῦντι*” (“For someone who has apostacized from childhood, that is, has been defiled, and is now repenting”). Goar, *Εὐχολόγιον*, pp. 693–4. Such a person is received by chrismation.

23 It is not clear whether the expression means for two years, or for two Lent periods, Christmas and Easter, in the same year.

24 “Whoever has denied Christ and has violated the Mystery of salvation ought to weep through the rest of his life, and he owes the obligation as a debt to acknowledge and confess the fact at the time when he is about to pass out of this life, when he shall be deemed to deserve the right to partake of the Holy Elements, by faith in the kindness bestowed upon human beings by God.” D. Cummings, *The Rudder* (Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957), p. 834; Cf. also the eleventh canon of the 1st Ecumenical Council, in *ibid.*, p. 180.

25 PG 100:1300A–1301A.

26 PG 100:1300, n.(5).

clothes.<sup>27</sup> These are τὰ ἐμφώτια (lit., “the garments of illumination”), as Gregory of Nazianzos had called them earlier in his oration “On the holy Baptism”,<sup>28</sup> or ἱμάτια καινά (“the clothes of newness”, or simply “new clothes”) as Methodios calls them now. The name also “ἐμφώτιος ἐσθῆς” (illuminated gown, or gown of illumination), which is found in the fourth century literature, disappears gradually. Its last reference is found between the years 600–629.<sup>29</sup> However, the practice itself continues, as Methodios’ descriptive name (ἱμάτια καινά) shows. In fact, the practice was adopted by Muslims for their own converts, especially prominent converts, to Islam.<sup>30</sup>

The choice of words in the six Εὐχαὶ Ἰλαστικαί (prayers of expiation) in Methodios’ service reveals the attitude of the Byzantine Church towards the denunciation of one’s Christian faith: the first of these prayers talks about “deviation from [God’s] commandments” and “deliverance of oneself to death”; of an “evil destruction” and of “death” from which mankind was saved by the incarnation of the Lord.<sup>31</sup> The second prayer speaks of the Church as the means through which sins are held or forgiven, and asks that God may receive the servant who returns from “the way of error” and repents.<sup>32</sup> With the third prayer the Church prays that the servant of God whom God “saved from the captivity of the godless enemies” be “united to the society of His people”, that God may illuminate his mind, inflame the spark of Baptism in him, “keep away his mind from every habit of pagan atheism” and make him sharer of his mysteries.<sup>33</sup> The fourth prayer prays that the person who has lapsed either because of [physical or spiritual] “infancy” or “of any other “adventure” (περιπέτεια), be

27 Cf. Ph. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμὸς* vol. IV, Athens 1951, p. 51, and n. 4.

28 *Oration* 40; PG 36:360B–425D, at 393C.

29 Koukoules, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

30 We have here in mind the case of Samau’al al-Maghribī (c. 1130–1175), a prominent Jewish mathematician and physician born in Baghdad who lived in Iraq and Iran. His conversion was not even preceded by a period of catechesis or indoctrination. Samuel himself in the second part of his *Iḥḥam al-‘ahūd* (“Silencing the Jews”) which is, actually, his autobiography, describes his conversion: he decided to become a Muslim after he had experienced a series of visions and dreams. On the day of his induction a new suit of clothes was hastily prepared for him and he was then brought to the Mosque. “The judge”, writes Samuel, “delivered a sermon, speaking at length in my praise ... For the most part the assembly was occupied with myself”. Moshe Perlmann, “Samau’al al-Maghribī and his Anti-Jewish Tractate”, “Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter”, 25. Wolfenbütteler Symposium. Wolfenbüttel, 11–15 June, 1989, published as “Samau’al al-Maghribī (XII century)” in Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner, *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1992, pp. 351–356.

31 *Εὐχολόγιον*, ed. Zervos, p. 589–590.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 590–1.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 591–2.

received as the “prodigal son” within the flock of the reasonable sheep.<sup>34</sup> The fifth prayer prays that the “lost sheep” be accepted back to the flock and be protected from “the wolves by which he had been caught”. Immediately after this prayer the convert is chrismated as a newly baptized person.

The last prayer invokes that the person who “has returned from the way of error” be guided to the faith and to the fragrance of the Holy Spirit “and become worthy of receiving the Holy Communion”.

Methodios’ service and the various categories of converts has a precedent in Timotheos, a presbyter of the Church of Constantinople and *σκευοφύλαξ* (sacristan) of the Church of the Theotokos in Chalkopratis who, in about 622,<sup>35</sup> wrote a treatise under the title “Περὶ τῶν προσερχομένων τῇ ἁγίᾳ Ἐκκλησίᾳ” (“Regarding those who are joining the holy Church”).<sup>36</sup> Timotheos divides those who proceed, or actually return, to the Church into three categories: those who have to be baptized; those who are not to be baptized, but only chrismated; and those who are to be neither baptized nor chrismated, but admitted to the Church by denouncing every heresy, including their own.<sup>37</sup> He then proceeds to name the heresies which fall into each of these three categories and to give a brief description of them and of their splinter groups.<sup>38</sup> In the first category belong, among others, the Gnostics. The Arians, among others, are placed in the second; and the Nestorians, among others, in the third category! One may wonder whether, on the basis of this order, a controversialist who considered Islam to be an Arian heresy would have recommended chrismation, while if he considered Islam to be a Nestorian heresy would have recommended neither baptism nor chrismation for a Muslim wanting to become a Christian! In fact, various opinions existed among early Byzantine anti-Islamic polemicists as to the nature of Islam as it becomes evident from the writings of the earliest controversialists.<sup>39</sup>

The Byzantine Church must have been faced at some time with the dilemma as to whether it was possible for Timotheos’ formula to be applied to Muslims who wanted to become Christians. And it is at such a junction, as to how the

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 592–3.

35 Cotelarius, *Monumenta Ecclesiae Graecae*, vol. 3, p. 626; PG 86/1:9–10, n. (b).

36 PG. 86/1:12–68D.

37 PG 86/1:69A–72A.

38 He repeats this list in a summary form in a letter of his to a certain John, whom he calls “most beloved of God, co-celebrant, and dearest one to me of anybody else”. PG 86/1: 69A–73B. Who is this John is not made clear, but the address does not sound as of one presbyter to another!

39 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “John of Damascus on Islam. Revisited”, *Abr-Nahrain* 23 (1984–85) p. 108 (see Chapter 18 in this volume).

Church should receive converts or reconverts from Islam,<sup>40</sup> that Methodios' canon could have come as a clarification. We must see Methodios' service as a development of Timotheos' treatise, and in response to receiving apostates who had apostatized as a result of the Muslim conquests.

The centrality of Methodios in matters of conversion can be testified to by yet another evidence. Appended to *Θησαυρός Ὁρθοδοξίας* chapter xx, where the *Order* is included, and as a kind of supplement to it, there is a brief text entitled "Περὶ τῆς καινοφανοῦς αἰρέσεως τῶν Λιζικιανῶν" ("Regarding the newly-appeared heresy of the Lizikians");<sup>41</sup> a text which Jean Guillard<sup>42</sup> has identified as an authentic fragment of the *Vita Methodii*<sup>43</sup> by Gregory Asbestas, Methodios' friend and archbishop of Syracuse (d.880). The inclusion of these two texts, the *Order* and that on the reconversion of the Lizikians, in the same chapter of the *Θησαυρός*, may suggest that it was a common procedure that was followed for the Lizikians returning from Manichaeism and for converts to Islam who were returning to the Church; namely, abjuration, chrismation and dressing with baptismal clothes. Furthermore, as Guillard suggests, these texts point to the rising phenomenon of reconciliation of apostates with the Church, something which was hardly known before the ninth century.<sup>44</sup> Also, of the very few writings which are known to be of Methodios there exists a letter addressed to the Patriarch of Jerusalem entitled, "Ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει τῶν ἀποστησάντων ἱερέων" ("Regarding excommunicating priests who have apostasized [to iconoclasm]").<sup>45</sup> This is a further evidence of Methodios' particular interest in canonical matters regarding apostates, either from the faith or from the Orthodox doctrine of Christianity, a matter on which he provides us with an early and valuable information. The fact that the phenomenon of reconciliation of apostates with the Church takes place during the time of Methodios and it is connected with his name, points to an active and pastoral role which this moderate ecclesiastic played on this issue.

The possible connection between the defeat of iconoclasm, as a multi-heretical and a multi-religious phenomenon,<sup>46</sup> and the return of apostates

40 Cf. Jean Guillard, "Deux figures mal connues du second iconoclasm", *Byzantion* 21 (1961) pp. 378–9. Repr. in his *La vie religieuse à Byzance* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981) # vi.

41 PG 140: 281D–284A.

42 "Deux figures", pp. 371–401.

43 PG 100:1244–1261.

44 "Deux figures", pp. 378–9.

45 PG. 100:1292C–1293B. This must be his contemporary John VI, Patriarch of Jerusalem (838–842). Obviously, Methodios wrote this letter before he became Patriarch of Constantinople in 843.

46 Cf. Leslie W. Barnard, *The Graeco-Roman and Oriental Background of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974). Cf. also Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos. Sources in*

to the Church is another interesting, obscure and largely speculative matter, which can add another dimension to the on-going discussion over the causes and the character of Byzantine iconoclasm. One may wonder as to whether some of those living on the extremities of the Empire, or some nominal Christians or Christians by convention, had not become through the iconoclastic teachings so attuned to Paulicianism, Manichaeism, Judaism and Islam that for them converting to any one of these faiths had not appeared to be a kind of “routine”, or some unconscious transition in their life.

Nicetas' version of the ritual of conversion shows a striking similarity in procedures, words and spirit with another ritual of conversion, from Judaism to Christianity.<sup>47</sup> One may find ample evidence to suggest that conversion from Islam to Christianity adopted texts and modified existing procedures of conversion from Judaism or from other religious communities. For example, the eighth canon of the 2nd Council of Nicea (787) stipulates that Jews, who do not accept the Christian faith honestly and sincerely, pretending only to be Christians but otherwise continuing their Jewish customs and practices, should not be admitted to the Church, nor should they be allowed to own a slave, neither themselves nor their children.<sup>48</sup> As conversion from one religion to another was taking place at times for superficial reasons or for reasons of expediency, the requirement for a public declaration of one's sincerity became obligatory.<sup>49</sup> If seeking social status, or in order to marry a Christian were some of the reasons for converting to Christianity, another reason was in order to avoid a possible harsher punishment for a crime committed.<sup>50</sup> The explicit, sincere and conscientious acceptance of the Christian faith is an absolute prerequisite for admitting one to the Church. Marriage of a Jewish or Muslim woman to a Christian man does not make her automatically a Christian, as the response of the canonist Theodore Valsamon (d. 1199) to the 49th question of Mark, Patriarch of Alexandria, indicates; nor does marriage of a Christian to a non-Christian annul his or her baptism.<sup>51</sup> Thus, one notices on this point the similarity between the *Order* and an “*Εκθέσις*” or “*Exposition*” as to how the

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*Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) *in passim*, for the treatment of iconoclasm by the 11 Council of Nicea (787) as a doctrinal thesis restating previous Christological heresies.

47 *Εὐχολόγιον*, ed. Zervos, pp. 672–8; and a shorter one in Goar, *Εὐχολόγιον*, pp. 282–3.

48 Cf. G.A. Rallis and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, Vol. 11 (Athens, 1852), p. 583; subsequently referred to as *Σύνταγμα*.

49 Cf. above. n. 11.

50 Cf. Chapter seven of Photius' *Νομοκάνων* which refers to Jews who seek to become Christians in order to avoid being punished for a crime, or paying back a loan. *Σύνταγμα*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1852), p. 123.

51 *Σύνταγμα*, vol. 111 (Athens, 1854), p. 484.



Church should accept the one who enters “the faith of the Christians from the [religion of the] Jews”, found in the *Euchologion*. This “Exposition” begins with the following characteristic statement:

He who proceeds from the religion of the Jews to a life as a Christian, must first denounce every lawful Jewish practice and thus demonstrate that he wants to live as a Christian with all his soul and heart and sincere faith; he must renounce manifestly in front of the Church [congregation] everything pertinent to the Jewish religion and all the ancient practices [or precepts] of the law. He must also anathematize all the practices and customs which were invented subsequently and are in variance with the will of God. The priest will speak first and the one to be baptized, or his sponsor (if he happens to be a child or speaks some other language) will respond.<sup>52</sup>

One can hardly miss noticing the striking similarity between this introductory directive and the equivalent one in Nicetas’ *Order*.

The Muslim community also faced early the situation of superficial conversions for reasons of fear or social expediency. Since the mere making of the confession of faith (*shahādah*), that is, reciting the *kalima* (the “word”, i.e. *lā ilāha ill’ Allāh, Muhammadun rasūl al-lāh*, “There is no deity but God, Muhammad is the apostle of God”) would make one a Muslim, Muslim theologians and jurists imposed the following preconditions for the recital of the *shahādah* to be considered valid: to be repeated aloud; to be perfectly understood; to be believed in the heart; to be professed till death; to be recited correctly; to be professed and declared without hesitation!<sup>53</sup>

Beyond the pastoral interest of the Church in bringing back to the flock those who had apostatized to Islam, the Byzantines were also interested in converting Muslims to Christianity, especially prominent Muslims; so were the Muslims. For the Byzantines, conversion was seen, among others, as a way of easing and eventually ending the conflict with the Arabs. Thus, the narrator of the preface to Emperor John Cantacuzenos’ (1341–1355) “Four Apologies against the Mohammedan sect”<sup>54</sup> expresses his disappointment because conversions of prominent Muslims do not happen frequently “so as to ease the war

52 *Eυχολόγιον*, ed. Cangelarius, pp. 451–5.

53 Cf. Arthur Jeffery ed., *Islam. Muhammad and his religion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), p. 155.

54 PG 154:372–584.

of our nation”.<sup>55</sup> Much earlier, Emperor Manuel I Comnenos who had ordered the deletion of the anathema “of the God of Muhammad” had hoped precisely for that. Byzantine orators, some of whom were even ideologically opposed to Manuel, have praised him for striving to fill the sheep yard of the Church with those who live apart, giving birth to many more children to his nation “like another Abraham”;<sup>56</sup> a direct inference, perhaps, to Muslims who believe themselves to be the descendants and the continuators of the *dīn Ibrahim*, the religion of Abraham.

In the long and largely obscure history of conversion of Muslims to the Church, there are only few texts which allow us a glimpse into the order of the ritual. For such conversions the Church inherited earlier models used for admitting non-Christians, or heretics, to its fold. From such models the Church developed a more articulate order of admitting Jews. This process was further elaborated and developed to include Muslim converts and reconverts to Christianity. As the process and its ritual became more elaborate, so the requirements of conversion were hardened. The evolution of the process and the development of the ritual seem to have progressed through three distinct stages, marked by the evidence of Timotheos the presbyter, Patriarch Methodios of Constantinople, and the unknown source of Nicetas Choniates.

55 PG 154:372B.

56 K.G. Bonis, “Ο Θεσσαλονίκης Ευστάθιος καὶ οἱ δύο “Τόμοι” τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Μανουὴλ Α' Κομνηνοῦ (1143/80) ὑπὲρ τῶν εἰς τὴν Χριστιανικὴν Ὀρθοδοξίαν μεθισταμένων Μωαμεθανῶν”, *Ἐπετηρὶς Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 19 (1949) 162–169; and his, *Εὐθυμίου τοῦ Μαλάκῃ, μητροπολίτου Νέων Πατρῶν (Ἰπάτης) (δεύτερον ἡμισυ 1β' ἑκατοντ.)*, *Τὰ σφωζόμενα*. Τεύχος Β'. Δύο Ἐγκωμιστικὸί Λόγοι, νῦν τὸ πρῶτον ἐκδιδόμενοι. *Εἰς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Μανουὴλ Α' τὸν Κομνηνόν (1143/80)*, (Athens, 1949) 1, 526.

## “Holosphyros”? A Byzantine Perception of “the God of Muhammad”

Among the works of Nicetas Choniates (ca. 1155–ca.1215/6), or “Acominatos”,<sup>1</sup> the twelfth-century historian, imperial secretary and public official in the time during the Comneni and Angeli dynasties, and appended to the xxth Book of his *Thesaurus Orthodoxiae*,<sup>2</sup> there is a text attributed to him entitled, *Nicetae. Ordo qui observatur super iis qui a Saracenis ad nostram Christianorum puram veramque fidem se convertunt*. (‘By Nicetas. Order followed on those who return from the faith of the Saracens to the pure and true faith of us Christians’).<sup>3</sup> In fact, this is not the complete liturgical order of conversion but the text containing only the *apotaxis*, that is the statement of renunciation of (lit. “departing from”) Islam, as well as the *syntaxis*, the statement of affirmation of (lit. “siding with”) the Christian faith recited by a Muslim in front of the baptistry when

1 Born in Chonae (Konia, Konya or Khonia) near the biblical city of Collosae in Phrygia, he is surnamed “Choniates”. For his other surname “Acominatos”, see *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Translated by Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), p. 367, n. 2. At the age of nine (ca. 1164) Nicetas was sent to Constantinople where, under the guardianship of his brother Michael the later archbishop of Athens (1182–1204), he studied under Eustathius, the later archbishop of Thessalonike. One may want to keep in mind this relationship between Nicetas and Eustathius in order to appreciate Nicetas’ siding with his spiritual master rather, than with his imperial one in the *holosphyros* controversy. Before 1180, the date of death of Emperor Manuel I Comnenos (1143–1180), Nicetas served as imperial secretary. Later, and during the reign of Angeli (1185–1204), he ascended to the highest ranks of political life to become in the end destitute and a refugee during the Fourth Crusade (1204). His *History* in twenty one books, a monumental work covering the period 1118–1207, is the most significant source of information on the reign of Manuel I, and on the controversy over the *holosphyros*. On Nicetas’ life, see Magoulias’ introduction, in *op. cit.*, pp. ix–xxviii. Critical edition of Nicetas’ History, *Nicetae Choniatae. Historia*. Recensuit Ioannes Aloysius van Dieten, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, vol. 11/1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975); subsequently referred to as Nicetas’ *Historia*. Translation by Magoulias, as stated above. The references are to von Dietem’s edition and to Magoulias’ translation, whenever this translation has been used.

2 PG 140:105A–121C.

3 PG 140:124A–136C. Subsequently referred to as *Ordo*. The text of the *Ordo* in the *Patrologia Graeca* is the one published by F. Sylburg in 1595, *Saracenicæ sive Moamethicæ opera Friderici Sylburgii*, vet. ope. bibliothecae palatinae. (Heidelberg, 1595), pp. 74–91.

admitted to the Church as a catechumen.<sup>4</sup> Baptism follows at a later time.<sup>5</sup> That this text, therefore, has been termed by Western scholarship as “Formula of Abjuration”, is not entirely accurate. More accurately, it is a public statement of renunciation of one’s previous faith, with an affirmation of his new faith; and this only as part of a lengthier process of an elaborate ritual of conversion.

The last of the anathemas and the conclusion of the *apotaxis* part read as follows:

And above all these, I anathematize the God of Muhammad, about whom he [Muhammad] says that “This is one God, *holosphyros* [ὁλόσφυρος lit. = made of solid metal beaten to a spherical shape] who neither begat nor was begotten, and no-one has been made like him.” Thus, by anathematizing everything that I have stated, even Muhammad himself and his *sphyrelaton* [beaten solid] god, and by renouncing them, I am siding with Christ, the only true God; and I believe ...<sup>6</sup>

With this anathema Islam, as a faith in God, is summarily renounced.

Orders of conversion of Jews and Manicheans to the Church with formulas of abjuration such as this can be traced back to the pre-Islamic times.<sup>7</sup> The

4 Montet has published a critical edition of the part of the *Ordo* which contains the twenty anathemas against Islam, i.e. the *apotaxis*, from three mss (*Palatinus* 233 (P) 14th c.; *Vindobonensis* 306 (V) 14th c.; *Bruxellensis* (B) dated March 1st 1281), collated by Franz Cumont, which also contain similar formulas of abjuration of Judaism and Manichaeism. Ed. Montet, “Un rituel d’abjuration des musulmans dans l’église grecque”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 53 (1906) 145–163, at 145; text, pp. 148–155.

5 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas “Ritual of Conversion from Islam to the Byzantine Church”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 36 (1991) 57–69 (see Chapter 24 in this volume).

6 PG 140:134A.

7 Cf. Franz Cumont “L’origine de la formule grecque d’abjuration imposée aux musulmans”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 64 (1911) 143–150, at 143. The format of a positive statement of faith and a list of renunciations can be observed even in the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, where after the statement of faith several anathemas were appended denouncing the teachings of Arius and Nestorius against whom the creed was formulated (e.g. “... and those who say that there was a time when he [Christ] was not, are anathematized by the catholic Church”). One hardly needs to be reminded of the earliest use of creeds in the context of baptism, and of the fact that the early Synodical creeds of the Church are compilations of *baptismal* statements. The Orthodox ritual of baptism contains, until today, the rite of exorcisms and the recital of the Nicene Creed which precedes the sacrament of baptism. In Islam also the various creeds consist of positive statements of faith and renunciations of heretical beliefs or statements. Cf. e.g. the *Fiqh Akbar* 1, and the *Wasiyat* of Abū Hanīfa in A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed. Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1965). The Abbasids also introduced a ritual cursing the Umayyads, with the name of Muawiya first on the list!

particular *Ordo* of conversion from Islam to Christianity must be dated from before the time of Nicetas Choniates, or the year 1180 when Emperor Manuel I Comnenos (1143–1180) ordered the deletion of this anathema. Montet,<sup>8</sup> in summarizing other suggestions, has rightly observed that the fact that the *syntaxis* mentions the veneration of the icons as part of the Orthodox faith and practice, allows us to assume that such a declaration dates from at least the year 843 when the veneration of the icons became a fully celebrated doctrine of the Church, if not even from earlier, when the 11 Council of Nicea (787) condemned iconoclasm and defined the theology of the icons. Sylberg dates the text earlier than 1152 and Cumont cites reasons why its date may be even much earlier.<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of internal evidence, namely that the list of Muhammad's successors renounced in this *Ordo* stops at the name of the Umayyad caliph Yazid I (680–683, a possible *terminus post quem*), as well as that parts of the text are verbatim reproductions from John of Damascus' (ca. 655–ca. 749) treatise on Islam, Cumont has concluded that this particular declaration was composed as early as in the second part of the seventh century, after the Arab domination of Syria.<sup>10</sup> However, one needs to be mindful of the fact that the expression *holosphyros* appears nowhere in the writings of John of Damascus and that a formal, uniform and widely used text of ritual abjuration presupposes frequent and widespread conversions from Islam to the Byzantine Church; something which did not begin happening before the end of the ninth and especially during the tenth century, after the Byzantines had scored some significant military victories and had reclaimed some of the former Byzantine lands and populations from the Arabs.<sup>11</sup>

8 "Un rituel", pp. 146–7.

9 Franz Cumont, "Une formule grecque de renonciation au Judaïsme", in *Bormannheft der Wiener Studien* (xxiv Jahrg, 2. Heft), pp. 233–234; cf. Mondet, "Un rituel", p. 146, n.1. Formulas of abjuration of Judaism and Manichaeism (and, therefore, possibly of Islam as well) seem to go back to the end of the ninth century, and during the Patriarchate of Photius (858, 867, 877–886). Cf. Brinkmann, *Die Theosophie des Aristokritos* (Rhein. Mus. LI), 1896, p. 273; and Franz Cumont, "La conversion des Juifs byzantins au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle" *Revue de l'instruction publique en Belgique*, XLVI (1903) 8–15.

10 Cumont, "L'origine", pp. 144–9. The writing of John of Damascus referred to here is chapter 100/1 of his book *De Haeresibus*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. iv. *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 60–67. On John of Damascus and an analysis of this text, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 51–95.

11 I have discussed these matters in a paper entitled "The Tenth century in the Byzantine Muslim Relations. An overview", presented at the 23rd Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association. Toronto, 1989, unpublished.

Somewhere else, therefore, and in a different age, the source and the origin of the *holosphyros*, especially in its polemic and derogatory meaning, must be sought. When in 1180 emperor Manuel I Comnenos ordered its deletion from the catechetical books of the Church, the anathema had already become entrenched into the *Ordo*, via the Byzantine polemic literature. No wonder, therefore, that his proposal was met with a vehement opposition. Two inter-related matters are raised here: a) What was the meaning of *holosphyros*, and how did this perception develop in the mind of the Byzantine controversialists; and b) what were the motives and the implications of the twelfth-century controversy over the deletion from, or the retention of the *holosphyros* in, the *Ordo*?

### 1 “Holosphyros” in the Byzantine Polemics

The adjective *holosphyros* appears in a number of variations and synonyms in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, such as *holosphairios* (“all spherical”), *sphyropectos*, *sphyrelactos*, or *sphyrelatos* (wrought with the hammer), and *holobolos* (“beaten to a solid ball”). One can also find the adjective *prosfyros* as a synonym to *holosphyros*. Clearly, the word “holosphyros” and its synonyms represent an attempt at rendering in Greek and in a monolectic way the exact meaning of the Arabic word *samad* in S. 112:2. This becomes evident in the Greek apologetic writings of the Greek and Arabic speaking Melchite bishop of Harrān, Abū Qurra (ca.750–ca.820). He rendered the surah *al-Tawhid* this way:

God is single, God is *sphyropectos* [beaten solid to a ball], who has neither given birth nor was he born, and no-one has been his counterpart.<sup>12</sup>

In retrospect it becomes obvious that later Byzantine controversialists, utilizing Abū Qurra’s translation of the *al-Tawhid*, focused on the figurative expression of *sphyropectos* or *holosphyros*. They used it literally and in a polemic manner, giving it the meaning of a lifeless *thing* that gives no birth and is not

12 *Opusculum*, xx, PG 97:1545C. On Abū Qurra with a survey of his references to Islam, see Sidney H. Griffith, “The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (c.750–c.820 AD), a Methodological Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature” (Ph.D. Dissertation; The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1978); and various studies by the same author, such as “Theodore Abū Qurrah’s Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of venerating Images”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105.1 (1985) 53–73; “Comparative Religion in Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians” *Proceedings of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference*, 4 (1979) 63–87.

begotten! However, this was not Abū Qurra's intention. To him it is the theology of the *al-Tawhid*, as a whole, which is objectionable and in variance with the Christian theology. In prefacing his translation, Abū Qurra contrasts the teaching of Muhammad and the Christian belief in a God of three hypostases (*trisypōstaton*) with the following words:

... the deranged pseudoprophet of the Hagarenes, Muhammad, under the influence of the devil, used to say that "God has sent me to shed the blood of those who say that divinity is by nature of three hypostases, and of those who do not say God is single ...

It is only after this preface that he continues with the translation of the *al-Tawhid*.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to Abū Qurra, John of Damascus had avoided the temptation to translate the *al-Tawhid*, thus bypassing the linguistic hurdle of the loaded word *sāmad*. Instead, in chapter 100/1 of the *De Haeresibus*, he summarized faithfully the essential teaching of Islamic monotheism and of Surah 112 with the following words: "He [Muhammad] says that there is one God, *creator of all*, who is not begotten, nor has he given birth".<sup>14</sup> Not only did he not misrepresent the Muslim theology but, perhaps intentionally, avoided tampering with the Qur'ānic idiom of *sāmad* for fear of causing confusion and misunderstanding, as the subsequent history eloquently proved.

Bartholomeos of Edessa (9th c.), who dealt primarily with matters of practice ethics and popular traditions rather than with theological matters, in his *Contra Mahomet*<sup>15</sup> states the *al-Tawhid* in a way that combines the rendering of John of Damascus and the wording of Abū Qurra:

He [Muhammad] says about God that, this is God, who created all things, and no-one has been like him, but he is God *holosphyros* who has neither given birth nor has he been born, but he is one God; and everyone who

13 PG 97:1545C. Of interest here is the key phrase "τὸ θεῖον φύσει τρισυπόστατον" ("divinity is by nature of three hypostases"). Obviously this is the definitive Christian terminology of the Trinitarian doctrine which the learned bishop uses properly; it is not the Qur'ānic understanding of the Trinity. Obviously, Muhammad could not have been able, aware of or keen to argue on the difference between "φύσις" (nature) and "ὑπόστασις" (hypostasis) which had caused bitter and lengthy Christological controversies among the Christians; nor could he have been aware of the distinction between the two made with reference to Christ and in the context of *Christological* definitions, rather than with reference to the divine essence.

14 PG 94:765A; Kotter, *Die Schriften*, IV, p. 61.

15 PG 104:1448–1457.

divides him, or makes one like him, will have no salvation but an unbearable and eternal hell.<sup>16</sup>

In his *Elenchus et Confutatio Agarenti*<sup>17</sup> Bartholomeos states also that God in the Qur'ān is referred to as *Allāh*, *Samad*,<sup>18</sup> *Jamet*,<sup>19</sup> “[names] which mean, obviously, [that he is] *holosphyros* and *holobolos*, that he can be held, and that he has a shape”.<sup>20</sup> This is the first instance in which the word *holosphyros* is explained as a material thing that has shape and can be handled. One may discern, however, Bartholomeos' reluctance to make this explanation a definitive statement, or to capitalize on such an interpretation. Perhaps he knew enough Arabic to remain polemic, without consciously distorting the meaning of *sāmad*. By stating also the other two names of God, Allah and Jamet (especially the latter), he seemed to recognize that such names could not possibly be synonymous to *sāmad*, with the meaning of a material substance.

The one who made the word *sāmad* an object of misinterpretation is Nicetas of Byzantium (842–912), the “Philosopher”, one of the most extreme Byzantine polemicists of Islam.<sup>21</sup> In his Refutation of the Qur'ān, chapter XVIII,<sup>22</sup> he writes this about the *al-Tawhid*:

The one hundred and eleventh<sup>23</sup> petty myth reads as follows: “Say, He is God one, God *holosphyros*. He has neither given birth, nor has he been begotten and no one is like him.” If *holosphyros* does not mean the shape

16 PG 104:1453C.

17 PG 104:1384–1448.

18 Spelled *Samēt*.

19 I do not know to which epithet of God this name corresponds. It may be a corruption of *al-madjid* (the Glorious one, in S. 11:73, 85:15), or of *al-wājid* (the Existing), which does not appear in the Qur'ān although it frequently occurs in the scholastic theology. Or, most likely, this may be the equivalent of *al-djāmi* (the Assembler of all, again, on the last day, as in S. 3:9; 4:140). Cf. D.B. Macdonald, “Allah” in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp. 34–35.

20 PG 104:1385C.

21 On Nicetas, see Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam. Textes et auteurs (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> S.)* (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1969), pp. 110–162.

22 PG 105:768B–777C.

23 He refers here to surah *al-Tawhīd* (“the Unity”), the hundred and *twelfth* surah of the Qur'ān where the w. *sāmad* occurs. The numerical discrepancy is interesting for the Qur'ānic textual history. Nicetas and other Byzantines seem to have known the Qur'ān with one hundred and thirteen surahs with an integrated text of the early Medinan surahs 8 [*al-Anfāl*, The Spoils (of War)] and 9 (*al-Taubah*, Rependance, the only surah that does not bear the *bismillah* at its beginning), instead of a Qur'ān with 114 surahs as it has been known.



of a sphere, it does mean density and compression which are characteristics of something solid.<sup>24</sup>

Nicetas of Byzantium seems to be the first controversialist who interpreted the adjective *holosphynos* in such a way as to depict Allah as a depersonalized, material God, and Islam as a gross idolatry. In a longer statement he explains this further:

The author of this laughable writing who was in no happy position to even make an orderly statement on either one of the two [subjects, i.e. Theology and natural sciences], except only to stammer in some way, wandered about. Regarding God he uttered this godless statement, that God is something spherical or rather, as he said, "God is *holosphynos*", thinking of him as something solid; otherwise he could not have a spherical shape. Being then, according to him, *a material sphere*, he [God] can neither be heard nor seen, mentally; which means that he is unable to act, unless someone else moves him, and he is even carried mindlessly with the face downwards.<sup>25</sup>

Nicetas is convinced that Muhammad believed in, and spoke of a God who is a material object with which there can be no meaningful relationship; an object which in itself is incapable of acting, unless someone else moves it! Such a pathetic perception of God would set, of course, Christianity and Islam completely apart, and in collision with each other. One has the feeling that, in the narrowness of Nicetas, Byzantine Christianity took its revenge for the Qur'anic and populist distortion of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity!<sup>26</sup>

Nicetas took particular exception to this issue, so much so that, in the XIXth chapter of his Refutation of the Qur'an, devoted a whole chapter entitled, "Towards those who say that God is *holosphynos*; he begat not nor was be begotten".<sup>27</sup> In this chapter Nicetas contrasts the Muslim theology to the Christian belief in God who in every respect – essence, power, will, eternity and activity – is infinitely superior to all things, and who for this reason can bring everything into being *ex nihilo*. Nicetas never suspected that Islamic theology was teaching precisely the same thing. He distinguishes three kinds of

24 PG 105:776B.

25 A figurative expression by which Nicetas wants, perhaps, to say that God is an impersonal being altogether. PG 105:705D–708A. Underlining is ours.

26 Cf. S.4:171; 5:73.

27 PG 105:784C–788B.

material substances: solid (corporeal), non-solid (incorporeal), and that which is made of the two. The characteristics of a corporeal substance are being three-dimensional, of density, and of consistency.<sup>28</sup> The characteristics of an incorporeal substance are being found everywhere, not being above everything even though it is incorporeal, and being circumscribable and a thing nevertheless. But what one would say about the essence or the substance of the creator? Only that he is *beyond* substance or essence (*hyperousios*). Density, consistency, and the triple dimensional characteristic are not, therefore, applicable to him! Thus, according to Nicetas, Muhammad has failed in his perception of God as *holosphynos*, even if one wants to take into account the emptiness (meaning the incarnation) of the Son and Word of God in the Biblical sense.<sup>29</sup> Because, according to Nicetas, the emptiness of the Word of God and his incarnation have to do with a power, movement and energy which is *beyond* movement, *beyond* power and *beyond* energy.<sup>30</sup> He calls, then, upon Muhammad not to shy away when he hears that the consubstantial and co-eternal Word of the Father is the creator and restorer of all creation; for he is *beyond* substance. The incarnate Word of the Father is of the kind who is *beyond* substance and *in a manner* which is beyond substance – that is, divine”.<sup>31</sup>

Let no one, therefore, say that if He was not born he gave no birth, either. Because we see that as he was not born, he was not created either. These two are necessary qualities of him who is without beginning. But we see that even though he were not created, yet he created ... It would have been, therefore, better if he [Muhammad] had said that, because He himself was not born, He gave birth, in the same way as because He himself was not created, He created.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, rather than as an essential attribute, Nicetas explains the Islamic notion of *sāmad* as a derivative of God's not giving birth and of not being begotten; which implies that, according to Nicetas, God's being a creator is denied in Islam – even his Being as such!

John of Damascus never followed this line of logic to deny the Muslims a belief in God as creator. He had stated, however, that to cut off the Word and the Spirit from the essence of God is tantamount, from the point of view of

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28 PG 105:785A.

29 Cf. Phil. 2:6–8.

30 PG 105:785B.

31 PG 105:785C.

32 PG 105:785C.

Christian theology, to making God a being who is “senseless and lifeless ... like a stone, a piece of wood or any of the inanimate objects”.<sup>33</sup>

The example of Nicetas of Byzantium was followed by Euthymios Zegabenos (11th–12th c.), contemporary to Emperor Alexios I Comnenos (1081–1118)<sup>34</sup> who commissioned him to write the *Panoplia Dogmatica* for the council of Constantinople in 1110–1111 against the Bogomils. For his chapter xxviii, Zegabenos used the writings of Bartholomeos of Edessa, *Elenchus Agareni* and *Contra Mahomet*. He wrought an almost verbatim amalgamation of the statements made by Nicetas with a further elaboration of his own to say that,

He [Muhammad] calls God *holosphryos*, that is spherical. Shape implies and it is a characteristic of something solid,<sup>35</sup> dense and compressed.<sup>36</sup> As a material sphere, according to him, God cannot be heard or seen and, as it happens, he is brought forth with the face down<sup>37</sup> and rolls down in a disorderly manner.<sup>38</sup>

Euthymios Zegabenos amplified further Nicetas' perception of the *holosphryos* as a spherical God made of matter. If Nicetas perceived and treated *sāmad* literally and explained it as a material spherical ball, Zegabenos added some jest to the image and made it rolling downhill erratically! It is at this junction that the deletion of the anathema against “the God of Muhammad” was proposed by Emperor Manuel I Comnenos; a proposal which started a controversy in 1180 between the Byzantine Church and the State, with little influence on the subsequent Byzantine anti-Islamic literature.

As an example, and opening a parenthesis on this point, one could refer to John VI Cantacuzenos. This Byzantine Emperor (1341–55) turned monk (d. 1383), in his 14th Oration or Dialogue *Against Muhammad*<sup>39</sup> calls Muhammad “a godless devil” who worships and preaches God as

*holosphairos* and utterly cold, who was not born nor did he give birth, not realizing, the wretched one, that he is worshipping a solid thing and not

33 Kötter, *Die Schriften*, IV, p. 63.

34 On Euthymios Zegabenos, see Khoury, *Les Théologiens*, ch. XI, pp. 235–248, and Andreas N. Papavasileiou, *Εὐθύμιος-Ιωάννης Ζυγαβηνός. Βίος-Επιγραφαί* (Nicosia, 1979).

35 Cf. Nicetas of Byzantium, PG 105:705D.

36 Cf. PG 105:776B.

37 Cf. PG 105:708A.

38 *Panoplia Dogmatica*, Tit. xxviii, PG 130:1341B.

39 PG 154:676B–692C.

God. Because a sphere is some kind of solid, and coldness is characteristic of solid things.<sup>40</sup>

Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425), as if trying to supplement Cantacuzenos, makes a contrast between this “solid and utterly cold” god of Muhammad to God of Christianity:

We, Oh you [Muslims], believe in one God, father almighty maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, without beginning, without end, without a body, without passion, impalpable, untouchable, intangible, without shape, without form, not *holosphairos* as you do, invisible, unseen, incomprehensible, inconceivable, unknowable, eternal, undefined, indescribable, uncontainable, intransitive, immovable, unchangeable, incorruptible, unapproachable, uncommunicable, according to the essence by everything of the creation, and, in summary, known not by his qualities, as we said earlier, but by what can be said *about* him in an apophatic rather than in an affirmative way ...<sup>41</sup>

In his XIth Oration Manuel makes reference to the Christian scriptures to show that the biblical typological language and the apophatic language of the Christian theology are not contradictory to, or in any tension with, each other, and in a pointed and sarcastic way he remarks that it must be strange and difficult to try to convince a Muslims that “sitting on the right” or “on the left” are figurative expressions used about God, since they believe that God, who is without shape, is *holosphiros*!<sup>42</sup>

Finally, Symeon of Thessalonike (d. 1429) in his *Dialogue against the heresies*<sup>43</sup> and in chapter XIV “Against the gentiles” writes:

... the most impious one [Muhammad] dares to call himself superior to Christ and to know God made of crystal and *holosphairos*.<sup>44</sup>

What is interesting is that, by the fifteenth century the Muslims had already been perceived as gentiles, and their god as a material “beaten rounded sphere” and, for the first time now by Symeon, as ... “made of crystal”!

40 PG 154:692BC.

41 *Manuel II. Palaiologos. Dialoge mit einem “Perser”*, ed. Erich Trapp (Wien: In Kommission bei Herman Böhlhaus Nachf, 1966), p. 122.3–10.

42 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 134.24–29.

43 PG 155:77–81.

44 PG 155:77D.

## 2 The *Holosphyros* Controversy

Emperor Manuel I Comnenos proposed that the "anathema to the God of Muhammad" be deleted from the master *Catechesis* of the cathedral of Saint Sophia and from all catechetical books.<sup>45</sup> He reasoned that it was scandalous that Muslims "be made to blaspheme God in any manner",<sup>46</sup> when converting to Christianity. What exactly ensued from this proposal represents two different perceptions of Islam based on a different understanding, or rather lack of understanding, of *holosphyros*; a misunderstanding which developed into a major clash between the Byzantine Church and State in 1180.<sup>47</sup>

Nicetas narrates that the Emperor presented his proposal to Patriarch Theodosios<sup>48</sup> and to the bishops-members of the Patriarchal synod with "massive introductory arguments".<sup>49</sup> In an unflattering way, Nicetas remarks that Manuel did not understand the meaning of *holosphyros* and that his *tomos*, or thesis, on the subject was done with the help of "flatterers and learned men"<sup>50</sup> [implying, of no ecclesiastical education] of the imperial court. The *tomos*, according to Nicetas, defended the "silly tale (I would not call it theology) of Muhammad", assailing openly the previous emperors and hierarchs of the Church as "ignorant and thoughtless men, for having allowed the true God to be anathematized".<sup>51</sup> The bishops objected to the imperial proposal vehe-

45 Nicetas makes a distinction between the *catecheticon pyction* (or, tablet of catechesis) and *catecheteria biblia* (or, books used as catechetical instruments). The former implies a firm, official, "mother tablet", or the cathedral text, from which all other churches derived the material for their services, the texts of baptismal confessions or declarations of converts, and the instruments of instruction for the initiates. *Historia* 213/121. Chalandon interprets *pyction* as a slab of marble housed in the cathedral of St. Sophia on which the catechetical text of the Church was inscribed. Ferdinand Chalandon, *Les Comnène. Études sur l'Empire byzantine au XI<sup>e</sup> et au XII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Vol. II (2) Jean II Comnène (1183–1143) et Manuel I Comnène (1143–1180)*. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1912), p. 661.

46 Nicetas, *Historia* 213/Cf.121.

47 The *holosphyros* controversy was a serious enough incident during the reign of Emperor Manuel to have attracted the attention of contemporary and subsequent historians and chroniclers. Cf. the *Synopsis Chronike* by an anonymous author, ed. N.K. Sathas, *Mesaionike Bibliothek* vol. VII, pp. 303–307; Dositheos Notaras, *Παραλειπόμενα ἐκ τῆς Ἱστορίας περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις πατριαρχευσάντων*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, vol. I [1891 (Bruxelles, 1963)] 247–249.

48 Theodosius I Borradiotes, Patriarch of Constantinople (1178–1183).

49 Nicetas, *Historia*, 213.

50 *Ibid.*, 214/121.

51 *Ibid.*, The *Historia* demonstrates not only Manuel's but also Nicetas' own attitude towards the religion of Islam.

mently, arguing that the anathema was not directed against God, the maker of heaven and hearth, but against

the *holosphyros* god who is neither begotten nor did he beget, fabricated by the jocular and demoniacal Muhammad; for God is believed by Christians to be Father, and this [faith] prohibits completely such absurd and frivolous words on the part of Muhammad".<sup>52</sup>

Apparently this *tomos* had little effect on the hierarchy, because Manuel had to issue a second and more extensive one in which he used rhetoric (something which Nicetas calls "bait")<sup>53</sup> to make his argument sound more dogmatic. It is only a pity that we do not possess the text of these imperial statements to be able to read Manuel's rationale against the anathema, and his own understanding of the *holosphyros*.<sup>54</sup> One can only surmise the content and style of the *tomos* from Nicetas' story, which is less than objective. However, Nicetas admits that the second *tomos*

so plausible did reason make the word appear ... that it was very convincing, by virtue of the diverse scope of the issue, the attractiveness of its elaborate argument, and in the careful examination of the meaning of its contents;<sup>55</sup>

so much so, that "almost the *holosphyros* God about whom Muhammad spoke so foolishly would have been glorified as the true God had not the patriarch resisted strenuously".<sup>56</sup> The Emperor invited the bishops to consider again the issue. The Patriarch and the bishops sailed to the palace of Scoutarion in Damalis where the ailing Emperor had gone in order to benefit from its mild climate. The Church delegation was received by the influential sub-secretary Theodore Mantzoukis who, announcing to the bishops that the health of the Emperor would not allow them to see him personally, handed to them the imperial "documents". One of the documents was dealing with the doctrinal

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52 *Ibid.*, 213–4/Cf.121.

53 *Historia*, 215/122.

54 Franz Dölger, *Corpus des griechischen Unkunden des Mittelalters und des neuern Zeit. 2 Teil: Regesten von 1025–1204* (München U. Berlin: Druck U. Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, 1925), p. 87, #1529, 1530.

55 *Historia*, 214/121–2.

56 *Historia*, 215/122. Patriarch Theodosios I Borradiotes was of Armenian origin. Whether his attitude towards Islam had anything to do with the frontier mentality, as it is perhaps the case with Nicetas himself, one cannot say with certainty.

matter, which required their signature. The other, according to Nicetas, was a belligerent letter. In this Manuel was accusing Theodosios and the bishops of being intransigent, informing them that if they did not sign the *tomos* he would call a major council to which he intended to invite also the Pope. "For I would be ungrateful and irrational", the Emperor was saying in this document,

if I would not return to God, my king and the king of all, a minute fraction of the good things I have received from him, by making every effort so that He, being a true God, may not be subjected to anathema.<sup>57</sup>

The deletion of this anathema was for Manuel an ideological matter, and a matter of common sense and personal integrity.

Such a threat, coming after the 1054 schism, frightened no-one. If any, its impact may have had the opposite effect, as it hardened further the traditionalist and anti-Latin elements in the hierarchy. Eustathios of Thessalonike "filled with indignation by what was read and not bearing to hear that the true God is believed to be *something holosphyr*, a fabrication of a demoniacal mind",<sup>58</sup> stood up and made this extraordinary and passionate declaration:

I would have my brains in my feet and (showing the [episcopal] mantle on his shoulders) I would be wholly unworthy of this office were I to regard as true God the paederast, the camel-like master and the teacher of every abominable act.<sup>59</sup>

It is obvious that Eustathios contradicted himself and had missed the point of the debate completely. On the one hand the God of Islam is, to him, a material

57 Nicetas, *Historia*, 216/Cf.122.

58 Nicetas, *Historia*, 216/Cf. 122; the emphasis is ours. Eustathios was probably born in Constantinople. For the question of his birthplace, see Phaidon I. Koukoules, *Θεσσαλονίκης Εύσταθίου. Τά Λαογραφικά*, vol. I, (Athens, 1950), pp. 3ff. A monk, deacon of St. Sophia, teacher of rhetoric and eventually metropolitan of Thessalonike (1175), he became well-known for his comments on Homer and Pindar. However, when in 1832 his theological treatises were published (*Opuscula*, ed. Tafel), Eustathios was recognized also as a theologian and a reformer of monasticism. He wanted to see the monks restored as examples of moral and spiritual life, and the monasteries as centres of cultivation of letters. He wrote orations, letters and other pieces of literature. Phaidon I. Koukoules, *Θεσσαλονίκης Εύσταθίου. Τά Λαογραφικά*, vol. II, (Athens, 1950); and Koukoules, *Θεσσαλονίκης Εύσταθίου. Τά Γραμματικά*, (Athens, 1953).

59 Nicetas, *Historia*, 216–7/Cf.122. To what extent did Nicetas of Byzantium make an impact upon the philosopher and rhetorician Eustathios of Thessalonike is an interesting, but separate question.

object, a “something” rather than an absolute unity, simplicity and uncompounded entity; on the other hand, Muhammad is made to be God! It seems that Eustathios’ contention was with Muhammad himself rather than with Muslim theology. From then on nothing else mattered. The issue of *holosphyros* was only coincidental. His outburst made a profound impression upon the other bishops who “were struck dumb by what they had heard”.<sup>60</sup> This is an interesting insight into the dynamics of the *holosphyros* debate. The bishops of the Church had a remote sense and an outrageous view of Islam, which rendered any substantive discussion of the *holosphyros* issue irrelevant.

The whole story is actually one of a clash between two polarities within the twelfth-century Byzantine society, represented by Eustathios on the one hand, and Emperor Manuel on the other; or Mantzoukis himself, if one wants to read literally the wording “ὁ τοῦ γράμματος ὑπαγορευτής” (he who dictated, or composed, the writing), which Nicetas uses for Theodore Mantzoukis.<sup>61</sup> Dumbfounded by Eustathios’ reaction, Mantzoukis returned to the Emperor who

perturbed by the report of what had been said, gave an artful defence of his position, commending forbearance as never before. He counted himself among the most orthodox of Christians and asserted that he came from most holy parents, while shunning the censorious and the scoffers. He urgently appealed that a judgement be made between him and the archbishop of Thessalonike, for he said that if he should be absolved of believing in a god who is a paederast and distorting the faith, then a just punishment should be imposed upon him who belched out blasphemies against the anointed of the Lord. However, should he be condemned as glorifying another god than Him whom Christians worship, then he would learn the truth and be deeply grateful to the one who should convert him from error and initiate him into the truth.<sup>62</sup>

In actuality, the Emperor was calling for a public showdown between himself and Eustathios. Only the intervention of the moderate Patriarch Theodosios, who charmed the Emperor with his reasonableness, deflected a punishment for Eustathios. Manuel pardoned Eustathios and accepted “the reasons he chose

60 *Ibid.*

61 A strong personality, but of mild manners, he was one of the most intimate and trusted under-secretaries and envoys of Manuel. Michael Choniates, Nicetas’ brother and archbishop of Athens, addressed to him five letters, which provide some insight into Mantzoukis’ personality and office. Cf. Sp. P. Lambros, *Μιχαήλ Ἀκομινάτου τοῦ Χωνιάτου. Τὰ Σωζόμενα*, vol. II [repr. Groningen: Verlag Bouma’s Boekhuis n.v. 1968], Letters # 27, 30, 34, 54, and 59.

62 Nicetas, *Historia*, 217/122–3.



to give for his defence", but not without adding to him words of reprimand: "Being a wise man you should not show yourself to be foul-mouthed or inordinately overbold of tongue".<sup>63</sup>

The *tomos* was read, praised by everyone as "reverently orthodox", and the assembly adjourned itself agreeing to sign it. Both parties claimed victory; the bishops for having won over the objections of the Emperor, and the Emperor for having achieved "with a few words" what the previous *tomos* had not succeeded in doing. One may surmise that these "few words" were not the words of the second *tomos*, which was more extensive, rhetorical and dogmatic than the first – but rather the direct challenge which the Emperor had posed on the bishops; that is, to prove that accepting the "god of Muhammad" makes one, indeed, a non-Christian!

When the synod gathered on the next day in the patriarchal house to take action on what was agreed the day before, the bishops were not the same men. They demanded further deletions and changes in the *tomos* before signing it. The Emperor accused them of "inconstancy, fickleness and lack of intelligence".<sup>64</sup> A tenuous agreement was finally reached, by which the anathema against "the God of Muhammad" was to be deleted and replaced instead by an anathema against "Muhammad and all his teaching".

At this point Nicetas injects the story of the bishop of his own home town Chonae and his own god-father, named also Nicetas. He had foretold that Manuel would reign and live longer than his grandfather Alexios, but towards the end of his life he would go mad.<sup>65</sup> In the historian's own words, while different theories had been advanced as to the possible signs of the emperor's madness,

when the controversy over the above-mentioned doctrine was initiated and the emperor recklessly contended the first time that the god glorified by Muhammad as *holosphyros*, who is neither begotten nor begets, is the true God, everyone agreed that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy because this doctrine, being wholly opposite to the truth, was truly and absolutely the worst kind of madness.<sup>66</sup>

According to Nicetas, the time when the doctrinal controversy began, the illness of the Emperor prior to March, and his death in September 1180, do all coincide to uphold this prophecy! Behind this narrative one has to read Nicetas'

63 *Ibid.*, 218/123.

64 Cf. *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, 219/123–4.

66 *Ibid.*, 220/124.

own objection to the deletion of the anathema. The *Ordo*, which is attributed to him, contains the anathema intact. Nicetas, as a frontier man, had not many reasons to be particularly understanding and fond of the Muslims,<sup>67</sup> or, being a staunch anti-Latin and a pious person, of the conduct of pro-Western Manuel. He had set high moral standards for himself, and demanded the same from others, including emperors, especially on matters of sexual conduct. He had his own reasons, therefore, to be intransigent towards the Muslims and unsympathetic toward the emperor: Manuel's overtures towards the Muslims were equally contemptible to him as the Emperor's earlier love affair with his own brother's daughter Theodora!

Of Emperor Manuel I Comnenos, the key player in the *holosphyros* controversy, we only need to mention here that, unlike his father,<sup>68</sup> he was an admirer of the West and a great spender on entertainment. He had married twice, both times to Westerner princesses, Bertha of Sulzbach, renamed Irene, sister-in-law of Conrad III, King of Germany, and Mary, a French lady of rare beauty, daughter of the Prince of Antioch.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, Manuel had been a devoted supporter of monasticism (in its right place) with a passion for theological discussions,<sup>70</sup> and a man with a strong hand on matters of the Church.<sup>71</sup> In 1170 and 1171 he had initiated dialogues of union with the Armenian Patriarch Nerses IV with whom he had exchanged letters through a personal envoy, the philosopher Theorianus. While he was attempting union with the Armenians, Manuel was making similar gestures towards the Monophysites and the

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- 67 One has the impression that the real players in this controversy were Theodore Mantzoukis and Eustathios of Thessalonike, and their equivalent Emperor Manuel Comnenos and Nicetas Choniates. Chonae, a frontier Byzantine town, was occupied by the Seljuks after the battle of Manzikert (1071). They were evicted in 1090, but in 1191–2 Turkish troops pillaged the town, profaned and destroyed the altar, the pulpit and mosaic icons of the renowned church of the Archangel Michael. Also Nicetas became bitter at Emperor Theodore I Laskaris (1204–1222) for ceding Chonae to Manuel Mavrozomes, the father-in-law of the Sultan of Iconium. Cf. Magoulias, *op. cit.*, p. xi.
- 68 Emperor John II Comnenos (1118–43). Nicetas Choniates called John “the crowning glory, so to speak, of the Komnenian dynasty to sit on the Roman throne, and one might well say that he equalled some of the best emperors of the past and surpassed the others”. Nicetas, *Historia*, 47/27.
- 69 A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324–1453* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 376.
- 70 J.M. Hussey, *The Byzantine World* (N. York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 62.
- 71 With the approval of Patriarch Nicholas IV (1147–1151) he had his name placed in one of the *typika*. Whether also he, personally, had something to do with the shortening, or the deletion of some hymns from Church services, is not entirely clear. Cf. J.B. Pitra, *Hymnographie de l'Église Grecque* (Rome, 1867), p. 62. P. Trempelas, *Ἐκλογή Ἑλληνικῆς Ὄρθοδόξου Ὑμνολογίας*, (Athens, 1949), p. xxx.

Jacobites of Syria. He had even attempted to bring the Orthodox with the Latin Church together. In 1170 representatives of Pope Calixtus II (1168–1178) sat in synod with Patriarch Michael III (1170–1177) and the Constantinopolitan bishops. But the two sides differed so much from each other that this synod came to an early end.<sup>72</sup> Although conciliatory, Manuel was stern against heresy. For example, he did not hesitate to condemn bishop Demetrius of Lampsas, Crete, his personal envoy to the West who, in his effort to challenge the Latin doctrine of the *filioque*, advocated the Origenistic doctrine of subordination of the Son to the Father, teaching that John 14:28 ("the Father is greater than I") refers to the divine nature. Manuel dealt with this doctrinal matter swiftly. He convened a synod in Constantinople (1166) and asked that all biblical references to the Father be collected and be discussed in synod. This synod condemned Demetrius,<sup>73</sup> had its decree engraved on a plaque and placed in the church of Saint Sophia. Manuel took also severe measures against the opponents of this synod. All these may point to the political and the theological acumen of Manuel, but they do not explain his motives in having the particular anathema "to the God of Muhammad" deleted from the *Ordo*.

Byzantine Emperors showed particular interest in expanding Christianity, especially among those non-Christian prisoners of war.<sup>74</sup> Manuel seems to have been one of the most prominent Emperors in this respect. His enthusiastic interest in promoting Christianity has been the point which historians of his reign and orators have noticed the most. In fact, most of the surviving Orations of praise (*Ἐγκωμιαστικοί Λόγοι*) written in honour of Byzantine Emperors are for this particular Emperor.<sup>75</sup> Manuel is praised by Euthymios Malakes as "another Abraham", who multiplied his nation "by giving birth to children

72 Cf. Vasileios, K. Stefanides, *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία*, (Athens: 1948), pp. 414, 416 and 381, n.2.

73 The synod, in which the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem participated, stated that John 14:28 refers to the human nature, although it can also apply to the second person of the Trinity, since the Word and Logos who proceeds from the Father has his cause in the Father. Stefanides, *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία*, pp. 426–7; Chr. Papadopoulos, *Ἡ Ἐκκλησία Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐπὶ Κομνηνῶν*, (1948), p. 31.

74 Cf. *De Ceremoniis*, II, 49. This policy seems to present a clear contrast at least to the earliest Muslim policy. Cf. Francesco Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, pp. 103 ff. Also the so-called "Ordinance of Umar" that forbids the instruction of the Qur'an by non-Muslims and the imitation of Islamic customs by Christians.

75 K.G. Bonis, "Ὁ Θεσσαλονίκης Εὐστάθιος καὶ οἱ δύο 'Τόμοι' τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος Μανουὴλ Α' Κομνηνοῦ (1143/80) ὑπὲρ τῶν εἰς τὴν Χριστιανικὴν Ὀρθοδοξίαν μερισταμένων Μωαμεθανῶν", *Epeteris Byzantinon Spoudon* (Athens) 19 (1949) 162–169. Subsequently referred to as "Εὐστάθιος".

through wars”.<sup>76</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume that the characteristic reference to Abraham can be taken as pointing to the conversion of Muslims, known to the Byzantines for their claim as descendants of Abraham and continuators of *din Ibrahim*. At this precise point Malakes justifies his praise of Manuel with Jesus’ dialogue with the Jews: “They answered to him, ‘Abraham is our father’. Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did’.”<sup>77</sup> This dictum must have served as Manuel’s incentive for seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity. Even Eustathios Katafloros, the bishop of Thessalonike, who opposed Manuel vehemently on the “anathema to the God of Muhammad”, praises the Emperor for “bringing to God those who are in an alien religion”, for “leading to the knowledge of God those who live apart”, and for “filling [with them] God’s court of sheep”.<sup>78</sup>

The desire to expand the influence of Christian Byzantium, coupled with an intense interest in matters of the Church, personal piety and religious conviction,<sup>79</sup> led Manuel I Comnenos to tackle the absurdity of the anathema against “the God of Muhammad” and the distorted meaning of the *holosphyros*, openly and courageously, in spite of the entrenchment of these notions in the Byzantine mentality and in its anti-Islamic literature and, thus to facilitate conversion for Muslims. The latest flare up of the *filioque* and the Trinitarian controversy with the Latin West, not only did not contribute to any better understanding of Islam, but made the hierarchy of the Byzantine East even more intransigent and introvert. However, Manuel I Comnenos’ openness, and his desire for dialogue, union and conversion, even as a political expediency, allowed him to take a creative posture toward Islam and the Muslims; a very different one from that of his contemporary Byzantine hierarchy – definitely, a radically different one from that of the Crusading West.

76 K.G. Bonis, *Εὐθυμίου τοῦ Μαλάκη, μητροπολίτου Νέων Πατρῶν (Ῥπάτη) (δεύτερον ἡμισυ 12<sup>ης</sup> ἑκατοντ.). Τά σωζόμενα*. Part II, *Δύο Ἐγκωμισιατικοὶ Λόγοι, νῦν τὸ πρῶτον ἐκδιδόμενοι, Εἰς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Μανουὴλ Α' τὸν Κομνηνόν (1143–80)*, (Athens, 1949) I, 526; and Bonis, “Εὐστάθιος”, p. 162

77 John 8:39. Bonis, *Εὐθυμίου τοῦ Μαλάκη*, I, 526.28, and “Εὐστάθιος”, p. 162, n.2

78 Cf. W. Regel, *Fontes rerum byzantinorum* (Petropoli, 1892–1917) I, 49.23; Bonis, “Εὐστάθιος”, p. 163, n.1.

79 Euthymios Malakes praises Manuel for the zeal which is burning his heart and for the care for the churches which is devouring his soul. With similar words Eustathios of Thessalonike praises Manuel. Bonis, *Εὐθυμίου τοῦ Μαλάκη*, p. 150; “Εὐστάθιος”, p. 163. The official documents related to matters of the Church issued by Manuel have been published by F. Dölger, *Corpus des griechischen Unkunden*, II, 62 ff.

## Hagiological Texts as Historical Sources for Arab History and Byzantine-Muslim Relations: The Case of a ... “Barbarian” Saint

An unlikely genre of literature for historical information on Arab history is, perhaps, Byzantine hagiology; and yet this may be often the case,<sup>1</sup> especially if the author happens to be – as a way of establishing the credentials of the otherwise well-known author – the 13th c. Constantine Acropolites (d. ca 1324), *logothetes tou genikou*,<sup>2</sup> and *megas logothetes*<sup>3</sup> under emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328), son of the unionist civil official George Acropolites (1217–1282), and the “New Metaphrastes”. One such example is Acropolites’ “Oration On St. Barbaros”, or more properly “On a barbarian saint”. The oration has been preserved in the Jerusalem Codex, Taphou 40, ff. 88–104a.<sup>4</sup> Constantine Acropolites earned the title of the “New Metaphrastes” (lit. “Interpreter”, or “Translator”) after the tenth-century Symeon the Logothetes, the “Metaphrastes”, the voluminous writer, refiner and rewriter, of *vitae* and encomia of saints.<sup>5</sup> Writing and re-writing lives of saints became a noticeable endeavour within the Palaeologan period. Acropolites belongs to a triad of such prominent hagiographers which

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- 1 The historical value of hagiological literature is beginning to be recognized by scholars in Byzantine studies. The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies has embarked upon a long-range study of hagiological sources for establishing a data basis on various aspects of everyday life in Byzantium. About hagiological texts as sources on art, see Alexander Kazhdan and Henry Maguire, “Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991) 1–20.
  - 2 For the office of the *logothetes*, see R. Guiland, “Les logothètes; études sut l’histoire administrative de l’Empire byzantin”, *Revue des Études Byzantines* 29(1971)5–115; and Nicolas Oikonomides, *Les listes de préseance byzantines du IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1972). For references to the specific office, see Jean Verpeaux, *Pseudo-Kodinos; traité des offices* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1966) *in passim*.
  - 3 In a list of 91 titles of the offices of the palace, this title numbers 9th in order of importance. Cf. Verpeaux, *op. cit.*, p. 300.
  - 4 ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, (Bruxelles, Culture et Civilization, [1891] 1963), vol. I, 405–20; subsequently references to this edition of the oration will be with page and line numbers.
  - 5 PG, vols. 114–116.

included also Nikephoros Gregoras and Philotheos Kokkinos. He proved to be the most prolific among them.<sup>6</sup>

In his Oration Acropolites eulogises what appears to be (the cautious identification of the saint at this time will be explained shortly) a ninth-century *myrovlete* saint, whose relics or tomb exhumes a sweet smelling myrrh. He lived during the reign of the iconoclast emperor Michael II Traulos (820–29). The theatre of his action, ascetic penance, death and cult became the region of Akarnania on the Ionian coast of Western Greece. The hero of Acropolites is emphatically identified in the oration as being “barbarian” in manners, cruelty and race,<sup>7</sup> native of a city called Barbaria, located by the borders of the Afro<sup>8</sup> which Byzantine writers identify with central North Africa inhabited by Arabs,<sup>9</sup> and certainly a Muslim.<sup>10</sup> He was a member of a Saracen army which

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- 6 For a provisional list of edited and unedited writings of Acropolites, see D.M. Nicol, “Constantine Acropolites: A Prosopographical Note”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 19 (1965) 254–6. For the hagiographical interest and activity during the Palaeologan period, see Alice-Mary Talbot, “Old Wine in New Bottles: The Rewriting of Saints’ Lives in the Palaeologan Period”. In *The Twilight of Byzantium. Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the late Byzantine Empire*, ed. by Slobodan Ćurčić and Doula Mouriki, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 15–26. Acropolites’ hagiographical works come to us from two codices, “Ambrosianus H 81 Sup. in Milan and “Taphou 40” of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Cf. Maximilianus Treu, “Νέος κώδιξ τῶν ἔργων τοῦ μεγάλου λογοθέτου Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Ἀκροπολίτου”, *Δελτίον τῆς ἱστορικής καὶ ἐθνολογικῆς ἐταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 4 (1892) 35–50.
- 7 “Βάρβαρος γάρ τὸ γένος, βάρβαρος τὸν τρόπον, βάρβαρος τὴν ἀπὴνεια.... Βάρβαρος τέως ἦν καὶ ἀλλόφυλος” (406, 1–2, 5).
- 8 “Ἦν μὲν ἐκ Βαρβάρων ... ὡς δὲ λόγος αἰρεῖ καὶ πόλεως οὕτω παρωνομασμένης, περὶ ποῦ τὰ τῶν Ἄφρων ὄρια τυγχανούσης” (410, 12–15).
- 9 For references to Afro in the Byzantine literature, see Dion. A. Zakythenos, “Ἅγιος Βάρβαρος”. In *Εἰς μνήμην Κ. Ἀμαντου*, Athens (1960), pp. 443–4, and p. 444, n. 1. In the post Byzantine literature also the region west of Egypt is called “Barbaria”. Cf., for example, the references in Nectarios the Cretan, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1602–1676), *Ἐπιτομὴ τῆς Ἱεροκοσμικῆς Ἱστορίας* (Athens: Ekdoseis I. Mones tou Theovadistou Orous Sina, 1980), pp. 26, 188.
- 10 “Οἱ ἐκ τῆς Ἄγαρ, τὸ δυσσεβέστατον ἔθνος καὶ ἀπηνέστατον”; 408, 3–5. The expressions “the descendant of Hagar”, or “those of Hagar”, or “Saracens” (or “Sarracens”) are common, and derogatory, expressions for Arab Muslims. See John of Damascus, *Haer.* 100/1 in Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. iv. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), p. 6; and Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “Heresy of the Ishmaelites:* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 68–71. Vasiliev identifies the “barbarians” mentioned in the life of another ninth-century saint, St. Peter of Argos, as the Bulgarians and the Slavs. A.A. Vasiliev, “The “Life” of St. Peter of Argos and its historical Significance”, *Traditio* 5 (1947), p. 178. It is clear, however, from Acropolites’ oration, that the proximity of life of St. Barbaros and of St. Peter of Argos in geography and time makes these “barbarians”, including St. Barbaros himself, to be Muslim Arabs.

in the ninth century overtook Nikopolis of Epirus in Western Greece, but was defeated when the people of Ambrakia and Dragamestos formed an alliance against it. He survived this defeat by hiding in a vineyard, terrorising and killing the local peasant population. After a vision, which he had in the chapel of St. George in the wooded area of Nysa while in pursuit of the celebrant priest, he was converted to Christianity and baptized. After his conversion he demanded from the celebrant priest John, who became his spiritual father, to bind him with chains around his neck and hands as a penance for his crimes; this way he lived an austere ascetic life for three years, walking on his hands and feet like an animal. In the late hours of a day, he was killed accidentally by hunters who mistook him for a beast. With the help of his spiritual father, his identity was recognized. His killers wanted to bring his remains to their city, Nikopolis, the capital of the homonymous thema near today's Preveza, and venerate him as their patron saint, but the body of the slain ascetic slipped away from them and remained hidden in the ground. From the place where the body disappeared, sweet smelling myrrh started springing out. The saint, his real name never having become known, entered local martyrologia, and eventually the hagiologion of Constantinople, as "St. Barbaros the myrovlete"; in fact a more accurate appellation would be "St. Barbarian" or, even more correctly, "the barbarian saint"!

Under the name Barbaros there are at least four personages found in Church hagiologia. One of them is a fourth-century martyr who can rather easily be distinguished from the hero of Acropolites.<sup>11</sup> A more difficult task, however, is to distinguish the saint of Acropolites from two other personages which are listed in existing hagiologia and synaxares under the same name and with very similar, although distinct, characteristics and circumstances of life. The first one is a former bandit of Christian origin from Egypt who through penitence became a saint. His cult as a myrovlete saint in Ochrid, Bulgaria is attested to in an exhortation-letter sent to the Patriarch and the clergy of Tirnovo by Kallistos I, Patriarch of Constantinople (1350–54, 1355–63).<sup>12</sup> At this point it is important to consider that Kallistos, prior to becoming Patriarch, had lived as a disciple of Gregory Palamas at Mt. Athos and was a staunch defender of

11 Text in Hippolyte Delehay, "Les actes de S. Barbarus", *Analecta Bollandiana* 29 (1910) 289–301.

12 Text in Fr. Miklosich and Ios. Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 1, (Vindolbonae: Carolus Gerold, 1860), pp. 436–442. The date 1355 stated for this document has been revised to 1361–2; cf. J. Darrouzès, *Les registes des actes du Patriarchat de Constantinople*, vol. 1: *Les actes des Patriarches*, Fasc. v: *Les registes de 1310 a 1376*, (Paris: Institut Français d'études byzantines, 1977), No. 2442, pp. 368–9, where a brief summary of the exhortation in French.

hesychasm. The life and acts of this St. Barbaros are narrated in a Bulgarian *vita*.<sup>13</sup> A similar saint is a “St. Barbaros Pentapolites”, whose hagiological synaxare, however, makes explicit reference to the Ottoman occupation of Greece and to sixteenth-century dates!<sup>14</sup> Finally, an eighteenth-century liturgical service, or *acolouthia*, dedicated to “St. Barbaros Pentapolites”, although seemingly composed in honour of this last saint, can be treated as an alteration of some earlier service, possibly in honour of the saint of Acropolites.<sup>15</sup> What makes things even more confusing is that all four saints are celebrated in the month of May.<sup>16</sup>

The puzzling configuration of very similar but conflicting accounts has led the eminent hagiologist Delehaye to conclude that St. Barbaros is only a fictitious personage, whose legend has been borrowed at different times and places and modified to fit local needs, and that his prototype is some other military figure, possibly St. Christopher.<sup>17</sup> However, upon closer examination and comparison of the various accounts, and especially on the basis of the historical evidence which the Oration of Acropolites yields, Delehaye’s theory can be discounted as unfounded. Here is the gist of this evidence:

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- 13 Bulgarian text published by Jacimirskij in 1898. Comments by K. Radčenko, “Einige Bemerkungen zur neugefundenen Abschrift des Lebens des heil. Barbar in bulgarischer Übersetzung”, *Archiv für Slavische Philologie* 22 (1900) 575–76.
- 14 Constant. C. Doukakis, *Μέγας Συναξαριστής πάντων τῶν ἁγίων τῶν καθ’ ἅπαντα τὸν μῆνα Μαΐου ἐορταζομένων, ἤτοι Σαρδόνυξ τοῦ νοητοῦ παραδείσου. Βιβλίον ψυχωφελέστατον μεγάλης συλλογῆς βίων ἁγίων* (Athens (1892), pp. 297–303; and Victor Mathaios, *Ὁ Μέγας Συναξαριστής τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. 5. (Athens, 1950), pp. 409–416.
- 15 Published in Venice in 1734, and in Kerkyra (Corfu) in 1886. Modern edition by S. Papakyriakos, *Βίος καὶ ἀκολουθία τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Βαρβάρου τοῦ Πενταπολίτου* (Patras, 1955). Papakyriakos has modified this *acolouthia* to fit the circumstances of the ninth-century saint of Acropolites, to the honour of whom this *acolouthia* might originally have been composed.
- 16 St. Barbaros the Pentapolites, according to his synaxare, died on June 23, 1562. Papakyriakos, who merges St. Barbaros Pentapolites with the saint Barbaros of the Oration of Acropolites, maintains that St. Barbaros of Acropolites should be commemorated on this day, June 23, instead of May 15, as stated in the synaxares for both saints. He explains the May 15 day this way: On May 14 in the year after the naval battle of Naupaktos (October 1562; Papakyriakos has it on 1571) the relics of the St. Barbaros Pentapolites were brought to Potamos, Corfu on their way to Rome, where they were venerated by the inhabitants and performed various miracles, noticeably in favour of the prominent Souvlakis family. In commemoration of this stop over and the miracle performed, the Christians of Corfu designated the next day, 15th of May, as a memorial day in honour of the saint; thence the date of May 15 stated in the synaxare and in the *acolouthia* as his memorial day of the saint. *Op.cit.*, pp. 5–6.
- 17 “Les actes”, pp. 288.



1. Acropolites was an iconophile and a devotee of saints; two coincidental and consequential positions. In his Oration to St. Barbaros is alluding to Emperor Michael Traulos' iconoclastic stand, and to his diplomatic contacts with the Western emperor Louis the Pious (814–840) through whom the emperor wanted to curtail the alliance of Pope Eugene II (824–827) with the byzantine iconophiles.<sup>18</sup> Traulos' move had, of course, much to do with the emperor's concern over the magnitude of the Arab threat in the Mediterranean and in the Aegean Sea in the ninth century.
2. Acropolites makes specific reference to the revolt of Thomas the Slav and the three-year civil war in the Byzantine Empire (821–3). Following this, Acropolites deals in greater detail with the historical context of St. Barbaros' story, which was the Arab conquest of Crete and the piratic pillaging of the eastern Mediterranean. As Acropolites speaks here of the naval occupation of Crete,<sup>19</sup> of Sicily (in 827) and of the Cyclades,<sup>20</sup> by "the descendants of Hagar, the most impious and cruel nation", he leaves no doubt that he is referring to Muslim Arabs.<sup>21</sup> These military successes were due, according to Acropolites, to the geographic location and relationship of these islands with each other. As a result, many people converted to Islam, either because they were overwhelmed by the sheer force of the invaders, or because of deception; the first implying conversion by force, while the latter successful coercion due to superficial Christian commitment on the part of the inhabitants. The conquest of the Cyclades and of Sicily which are pointing to major dislocations of Christian populations from the island to coastal cities in the Peloponnese, are mentioned also by other contemporary hagiological sources.<sup>22</sup> Acropolites'

18 "Οποῖον τῷ τότε τὰ πρὸς ἐσπέραν ἐπεπόνθει τῆς ἡμετέρας ἀρχῆς, μᾶλλον δ' ἢ πᾶσα συνεπεπόνθει ἀρχή" (407, 8–9); a pointed expression betraying the well-known anti-Western-Latin attitude of Acropolites.

19 While the dates of the occupation of Crete vary from 823/4 to 828, the occupation of Sicily is established in 827. On the Arab conquest of Crete, see V. Christides' monograph, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca 824). A turning point in the struggle between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984). On the revolt of Thomas and the Arab conquest of Crete and Sicily, see A.A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, tome I [Brussels (1959)], pp. 22–88. On the chronology of the conquest of Crete, still under debate, see Zakythenos, "Ἄγιος Βάρβαρος", p. 446, n. 3.

20 "καὶ τὰς ἐκ κύκλου παρωνομασμένας" (408, 6); i.e. "Cyclades" [islands].

21 "οἱ ἐκ τῆς Ἄγαρ, τὸ δυσσεβέστατον ἔθνος καὶ ἀπηγέστατον" (408, 3–5).

22 Cf. especially the life of St. Peter of Argos (ca. 850–ca. 920), as well as his funeral oration to Athanasios, bishop of Methone (d. post 879). As a young man Athanasios arrived in Patras from Sicily fleeing the Arab invasions. Subsequently he was elevated to the rank of bishop of Methone. Text of Peter's oration, in Chrestos Papaoikonomou, "Ὁ πολιόχως τοῦ Ἄργους Ἄγιος Πέτρος ἐπίσκοπος Ἄργους ὁ Θαυματουργός (Athens, 1908), pp. 91–106.

Oration and other sources describing almost contemporary events suggest that the purpose of these piracies was not so much the occupation and appropriation of land, but rather devastating the land, looting of its goods, harassing the population and taking prisoners from them, especially young women.<sup>23</sup>

3. The occupation of the islands was followed by an equally violent assault against coastal cities. The plan was to use these cities as bases for an attack against the rest of Europe.<sup>24</sup> Among the first of such cities was Nikopolis,<sup>25</sup> known in the local onomatology as Maza and “in the Greek naval language”<sup>26</sup> as ... Naupaktos! The confusion of the ancient city of Nicopolis, located six kilometres north of the present-day city of Preveza, with the southern city of Naupaktos, located a few kilometres from Antirion across the North-western Peloponnesian coast, may be explained as being the result of a political and ecclesiastical merger which had taken place between the two cities<sup>27</sup> when Naupaktos became part of the ninth-century thema of Nicopolis; otherwise, Acropolites is an early reference of these North-western Greek cities and toponymia, and an accurate one at that.<sup>28</sup> Acropolites is aware of toponymia and of their popular names as, for example, the name Maza or Mázoma (Μάζωμα, meaning literally mass or pile of earth) which was used for Nicopolis and its immediate environs by the local population at the time.<sup>29</sup>
4. Special reference is made to the Arab attack on Ambrakia, a city south-east of the Ambrakian gulf in the interior, thirty-two kilometres north-west of Agrinion.<sup>30</sup> The Oration informs us that Ambrakia was a famous city of Aitolia to which earlier sources had given extensive coverage.<sup>31</sup>

23 Cf. also the life and the orations of St. Peter of Argos. A. Vasilev, “St. Peter of Argos”, *Traditio* 12 5 (1947), 163–191; and Papaoikonomou, *in passim*.

24 “ὄλω θυμῷ καὶ θράσει ἀκατασχέτω ... ἴν’ ὡς ἔκ τινων ὀρημητηρίων κατὰ πάσης ἐφεθείεν Εὐρώπης” (408, 12, 13–14).

25 The Oration provides important historical details related to the assault against Nikopolis. Cf. a summary of these in Zakythenos, “Ἅγιος Βάρβαρος”, pp. 446–7. On Nikopolis, see Peter Soustal and Johannes Koder, *Nikopolis und Kephallénia. Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. 3, (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), pp. 213–6.

26 “ἐκ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων καταπλοίας” (408, 16–7).

27 Zakythenos, *op. cit.*, p. 447, n. 1.

28 On these cities, see Soustal, *op. cit.*, pp. 204, 210 and 213, where extensive reference of sources and bibliography.

29 Cf. Soustal, *op. cit.*, p. 209 where the relevant references and bibliography.

30 On Ambrakia with references to sources and bibliography, see Soustal, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

31 “πόλις γὰρ αὕτη τῆς Αἰτωλίας περίφημος, πλείστα πρὸς συγγραφὴν τοῖς τὰ ἀρχαιότερα ἱστορήσασιν ἐκ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ περὶ αὐτὴν χορηγήσασα” (408, 18–21). However, Soustal mentions

The city must have been well fortified, because the Arabs attacked its walls with particular violence and only after a concerted preparation.<sup>32</sup> The Ambrakians in turn mounted a courageous and ingenious resistance, “showing that necessity creates inventiveness and violence produces crafty people”!<sup>33</sup> However, the size of the enemy forced them to seek the alliance of the people of Dragamestos (or Dragameston), a neighbouring city on the Ionian coast, two kilometres from the ancient Astakos and thirty kilometres southwest from today’s Agrinion.<sup>34</sup> The sheer size of defenders which this alliance produced forced the Arabs to flee the scene.

5. The Arabs then attacked the city of Dragamestos itself. Dragamestos was the name by which the city was known to the locals during Acropolites’ time. According to Acropolites, the city was known previously by another name which he was never able to discover.<sup>35</sup> In spite of the support which the city received from the alliance of the thankful Ambrakians, Dragamestos found itself in great danger. A bitter fight was fought, during which the weakened Dragamestians turned to their faith. The fighters raised the cross and the icon of the Theotokos in front of the enemy. The enemy was defeated badly and, according to the expression of the Oration, the former lions fled running like rabbits.<sup>36</sup> The Dragamestians pursued the Arabs down to the sea butchering most of them. The rest were drowned in the rough waters of the sea.<sup>37</sup> Among the survivors, and possibly the only one, was the hero of the Oration. According to Acropolites’ account, therefore, the battle of Dragamestos must have taken place between 827 and 829; that is, after the conquest of Crete and of Sicily and before the death of Michael II which occurred in October, 829.
6. The deserter, who initially hid himself in a dense vineyard, must have lived hiding in the forests of Aitolia for some time, because at the time of the vision and his conversion the Oration has him as having acquired

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the life of St. Barbaros by Acropolites as the *first* source of reference about this city. *Op. cit.*, p. 104.

32 “ταύτη μετὰ πολλῆς ὅτι παρασκευῆς μετὰ πολλοῦ τοῦ θράσους προσβάλλουσι, τὶ μὲν εἰς τειχομαχίαν οὐκ ἐπαγόμενοι, τὶ δ’ οὐ μετὰ τὸ προσβαλεῖν ἐφευρόντες” (408, 21–23). Cf. Procopius, *On the Buildings* 2.9.4.

33 408, 25–26.

34 On Dragameston, see Soustal, *op.cit.*, p. 144.

35 Cf. 409, 7–9.

36 “τρέπουσι παρευθὺς οἱ τέως περιειδεῖς κατὰ λαγωὺς τοὺς θρασεῖς ὑπὲρ λέοντας” (409, 30–31).

37 409, 9–410, 4.

some Greek which he “spoke in a barbarian manner” and accent, “ill-sounding” and loudly<sup>38</sup> – another reference to the saint’s “barbarian” origin.

Thus, Acropolitēs’ hagiological Oration describes ninth-century events taking place in the triangle formed by the two coastal cities in the Ionian sea of Nikopolis and Dragamestos and the inland city of Ambrakia in Western Greece after the conquest of Crete, Sicily and the Cyclades. The information this hagiological text provides fills some gaps and sheds light on our knowledge of the military and political developments in the region of the Ionian Sea during the ninth century. It explains, for example, the necessity behind the administrative organization of the region into themata, all of them formed in the ninth century: the thema of Peloponnese is mentioned for the first time in 811; of Kephallenia (Cephalonia) in 845 or even earlier; of Dyrrachion in 845, and of Nikopolis in 899. The events narrated in the life of St. Barbaros suggest that the formation of these themata aimed not so much at holding back the Slavs, but rather at facing the growing Arab control of the eastern Mediterranean, Aegian and Ionian seas.<sup>39</sup>

From the point of view of Muslim-Christian relations and on the basis of this hagiographical source one would also be allowed to make the following observations:

- a) The Oration has as its central theme a eucharistic vision which St. Barbaros experienced in the church of St. George during the celebration of the Liturgy: a very handsome infant (βρέφος περικαλλές) moving about the altar, and the priest surrounded and lifted above the ground by two men in white.<sup>40</sup> Describing a vision on a eucharistic theme and capitalizing on it may not be unintentional or accidental.<sup>41</sup> During those times, especially

38 “βαρβαρικῶς γὰρ ἔξηχεῖτο καὶ τὸ διὰ χρόνου ἑλληνίσαν αὐτῷ τῆς γλώττης, καὶ θροῦς τις ὡσπερὶ ρεὶ θηριώδης καὶ δύσχηχος φωνούντος αὐτοῦ προεφέρετο” (412, 18–20).

39 Zakythenos, *op. cit.*, pp. 452–3.

40 “... πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ τὸν πρεσβύτερον καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν βρέφος περικαλλές ἀστεῖον περιπολεῖον τὸ ἄδυτον ... τεθέαται δὲ καὶ νεανίας δύο ὡς λευκὰ μὲν ἐνδεδυμένους, ἡλίου δὲ δίκην μάλλον δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ ἡλίον λάμποντας· οἱ καὶ ἐκατέρωθεν τὸν θύτην ὑπήρειδον καὶ τῆς γῆς ὡσεὶ δύο πῆχεις ἐτίθουσαν μετέωρον” (411, 20–412, 4).

41 Whether an iconographic representation of the theme of the vision was painted on the wall of the church, which the barbarian saw transformed in front of his eyes as a living vision, the text does not indicate. Such cases of transformations have been attested to elsewhere. Cf. Kazdan and Maguire, “Byzantine Hagiographical Texts”. Such a theme of angels holding a celebrant priest from the shoulders and lifting him above the ground does exist. A fresco in the *enkleistra* of St. Neophytos in Cyprus, presents the saint holding his hands folded in the shape of the cross on his chest (an iconic sign that he is also a celebrant priest); and two angels lifting him up from the shoulders above the ground.

immediately after the Latin occupation of Constantinople (1204–61) when the anti-Latin sentiment was high, a story like the one of St. Barbaros and his vision could serve to accentuate the Orthodox belief in the real presence of Christ at the liturgy and in the eucharistic elements. Through this Oration the belief in the reality of the presence of Christ is stressed and driven home even further by the fact that this is witnessed to and affirmed by a “barbarian” and “infidel” bystander who is able to experience that which is the essence of the sacrament, and to which professed Christians and even a “professional” celebrant had grown accustomed and thus unable to experience! One could easily dismiss such a hypothetical intention on the part of Acropolites if there was not an almost identical case and an almost exact precedent in a very similar hagiological eucharistic story narrated by Gregory Decapolites (d. 842), a contemporary to St. Barbaros. In Decapolites’ “Historical Sermon ... about a vision to which a Saracen once had and who as a result of it believed and became martyr ...” a Muslim prince is converted to Christianity and in the end he dies as a martyr for his newly acquired faith as a result of a very similar eucharistic vision.<sup>42</sup>

- b) Among the works of Ioseph Bryennios (ca. 1340–1430), one of the greatest theologians-missionaries of the era before the fall of Constantinople,<sup>43</sup> whom the synaxares mention as the possible source of information about St. Barbaros the Pentapolites (who might be none other than a modified saint of Acropolites’ Oration), there exists a “Dialexis” between Bryennios himself and a Muslim. This writing is characterized by a spirit of tolerance and a positive attitude towards Islam!<sup>44</sup> Given the lack of a *vita* of the saint Barbaros of Acropolites in hagiologia and printed synaxares *before*

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I owe this particular interpretation to my colleague Natalia Teteriatnikov, Curator of Visual Resources, Dumbarton Oaks Center. Of interest also is the fact that the particular Cypriot fresco is known to have been painted in 1183; a date close to the time of the life of Acropolites. Cf. Catia Galatariotou, *The making of a Saint. The life, times and sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 131. Thus one may assume that Acropolites was aware of such an iconographic motif upon which he based his narration of St. Barbaros’ vision, and that, if he had based his Oration on a previous source, such an iconographic theme may date from the ninth century.

- 42 Daniel J. Sahas, “What an Infidel Saw that a Faithful Did Not”. Gregory Dekapolites (d. 842) and Islam”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 (1986) 47–67 (see Chapter 23 in this volume).
- 43 On Bryennios, his writings and his life, see Ph. Meyer and N.B. Tomadakis, *Ὁ Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος καὶ ἡ Κρήτη κατὰ τὸ 1400. Μελέτη φιλολογικὴ καὶ ἱστορικὴ* (Athens: Ekdosis Bibliopoleiou E.G. Bagogiannē, 1947).
- 44 Text and analysis by Asterios Argyriou, “Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Βρυεννίου μετὰ τινος Ἰσμηλίτου Διάλεξις”, *Epeteris Hetaireias Byzantinon Spoudon* 35 (1966/7) 141–195.

Bryennios, it might be intriguing to hypothesise that Acropolites served as a source for Bryennios who in turn gave the saint and his story prominence as a way of reinforcing his positive attitude towards Muslims. Such an attitude coincides with the monastic character and the hesychastic ethos of Bryennios, which is also the case with other congenial personalities, most notably Gregory Palamas.<sup>45</sup>

- c) St. Barbaros, as St. Demetrios of Thessalonike, is called “myrovlete” because of the belief that sweet smelling myrrh has flown from the altar of the church (or monastery?) which was built in his honour.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Patriarch Kallistos’ letter mentioned earlier not only confirms the cult itself of the saint, but it states explicitly its intention: to refute St. Demetrios’ and St. Barbaros’ myrrh (*myron*) for baptism, and to question its use by the Bulgarian Church as a means of asserting its independence from, or its equal status to, the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople maintained the prerogative of preparing the *myron* and distributing it to all other Orthodox Churches to be used for the sacrament of confirmation of newly baptized, and even possibly for anointing a new emperor.<sup>47</sup> Beyond the ecclesio-political ramifications of the cult of St. Barbaros, it is quite interesting to consider that for someone who was a former Arab and Muslim, associated commonly in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature with pollution and filth,

45 Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, “Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 25(1980)409–436; and “Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) on Islam”, *The Muslim World* 73 (1983) 1–21 (see Chapters 29 and 28 in this volume).

46 The early cult of the saint is confirmed today by archaeological evidence. P.L. Vokotopoulos has identified the place of the cult of St. Barbaros in an old monastery church in the present day location of Loutra Tryphou, in Nysa. The mineral waters of the place, which have been considered as beneficial for various medicinal purposes, spring from the altar of this ancient church now in ruins. “Αρχαιότητες και μνημεία της Αιτωλοακαρνανίας”, *Archaiologikon Deltion* 22 (1967) 318–336. Papakyriakos mentions that the old church was discovered in 1878, and confirms that in the place Loutra there is today a small and poor church in the name of St. Barbaros. Cf. *op.cit.* p. 7. Sculptured pieces discovered during works of levelling the ground for building a new church in 1964, have been dated to be of the 12th century; the work of local technicians and not particularly artistic at that. Vokotopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 335. The findings point to an early tradition of a church, possibly to the original church built in honour of St. Barbaros.

47 On the question of the ecclesiastical politics of the *myron*, see D.M. Nicol, “Kaisersalbung. The Unction of Emperors in Late Byzantine Coronation Ritual”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2(1976)37–52; Paulos Menevisoglou, “Τὸ Ἅγιον Μύρον ἐν τῇ Ὁρθοδόξῳ Ἀνατολικῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ” (*Ἀνάλεκτα Βλατάδων*, 14, Thessalonike, 1972), and Aikaterine Christophilopoulou, *Ἐκλογὴ, ἀναγόμεναι καὶ στέψαι τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος* (Athens, 1956).

once having become a saint his body could exhume a sweet smelling myrrh! The phenomenon becomes a clear manifestation of divine energies operating through human beings, here and now; a clear hesychastic-Palamite principle of which Acropolites, as Patriarch Kallistos, was a staunch proponent! One may wonder whether the historical context and the qualities of the saint of this story are not accidental but rather pointed remarks and reminders, offered as a kind of checks and balances of hagiographers against the caricatures of Arabs and Muslims made by secular-minded Byzantines.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, Acropolites' *Oration* to St. Barbaros is part of a series of hagiographical sources which provide us with significant information pertinent to the Arab-Byzantine history in the ninth century, from the grass roots.<sup>49</sup> On another level, the *Oration* reveals that it was possible for the Byzantine psyche to accept a saint who had been a former enemy; in fact, such a phenomenon was even a desirable prospect which would demonstrate and prove the power and the superiority of the Christian faith. Secondly, especially at times of conflict with the Arabs, a saint who had been a former Saracen invader could prove to be the best bulwark against assaults by enemies who were his own people, when imperial diplomacy and arms could not have been proven effective. The kind of supplications found in the orations of Peter of Argos, the entire text of the liturgical service of St. Barbaros, and Acropolites' own supplications at the end of the *Oration* make the point of pleading with such a protector and liberator saint, abundantly clear. Thirdly, the *Oration* shows that at the very bottom of things the Byzantines recognized that by someone being a Muslim, Islam provided for him an adequate knowledge and made him sufficiently sensitive to revelation. Revelation through the grace of God can propel him to experiences which even baptized Christians – or even a celebrant priest – cannot attain.

48 Cf. Sahas, "Gregory Palamas", pp. 1–21; and "The Art and non-Art of Byzantine Polemics. Patterns of Refutation in Byzantine anti-Islamic Literature". In *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 55–73 (see Chapter 6 in this volume).

49 Other such hagiological sources of the same period are the life of St. Peter of Argos, Athanasius of Methone, Luke the Younger Stiriotes, Nicon the "metanoelite", and Martha abbess of Monembasia.

## Arethas' "Letter to the Emir at Damascus": Official or Popular Views on Islam in 10th-century Byzantium?

An in depth study of the tradition, content and significance of the Byzantine literature on Islam is, still, in its embryonic stage.<sup>1</sup> Some pieces of this literature are better known than others,<sup>2</sup> some are more recently discovered than others and, for some pieces, their study thus far has produced more questions than answers. This paper is an example of the latter case which allows us to look through so many glimpses of religious diversity in the 10th c. Byzantium, as many historical, linguistic, stylistic and contextual riddles we are determined to elucidate.

First of all, it has to do with an author who as eminently known is in the renaissance of classical studies and in the ecclesiastical and political matters of the 10th century, so is he unknown on matters related to Byzantium and Islam. He is Arethas, Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia (ca 850–932).

Very little is known of the life of Arethas, student and colleague of the learned Patriarch of Constantinople Photius (858–867, 877–886) and first in order among the metropolitans of the Constantinopolitan synod. What is rather fairly known of him is that he was the most influential church official of his times who had a great deal to do with the prohibition of the fourth marriage of Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912), the resignation of Patriarch Nicholas Mysticos (901–907, 912–925), the resignation of yet another Patriarch, Trypho (928–931), and the eventual ascent to the Patriarchal throne of Theophylactos (931–956), the young prince who became Patriarch at the age of ... twenty! What is even better known of him is that he was one of the most prominent intellectuals of his time, part of an extraordinary intellectual elite, which was responsible for the renaissance of the Greek letters and classical studies in the ninth–tenth century Byzantium. This century has justifiably been compared to the flourishing third century BC in Alexandria in terms of philosophical and literary activity and production.

1 Some of the most important works on the subject are mentioned in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the « heresy of the Ishmaelites »* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1972) up to the time of this publication.

2 A.-Th. Khoury has dealt with the rather evident, although not critically selected, literature found mainly in the *Patrologia Graeca. Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam. Textes et auteurs* (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> s.) (Louvain, Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1969).



He is the author of a *magnum opus*, "Commentary on the Apocalypse",<sup>3</sup> of scholia to Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Dion Chrysostom, Pausanias, Aristides, Lucian, Clement of Alexandria, Justin, Eusebius, Athenagoras, Tatian, Philostratos, Abū Qurra and to many more philosophical and theological writings, of which he made a collection; as well as of a number of letters, tracts, homilies and exegetical works, most of them only recently edited.<sup>4</sup>

Arethas has been noticed only after Popov utilized fresh material from the Moscow Codex 315 (now No. 441 by Vladimir) of the Moscow Historical Museum, to produce his work on *The Emperor Leo the Wise and his reign*.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the study of Arethas is relatively new and rather incomplete.<sup>6</sup> Popov's work is directly relevant to the study of the present text as he, for the first time, has translated into Russian one of these alleged Arethas' writings with the title (as Popov has read it):

Πρὸς τὸν ἐν Δαμασκῶ ἀμνηρᾶν  
προτροπῇ Ῥωμαίου βασιλέως<sup>7</sup>

although the codex reads clearly:

3 PG 106: 493–785; ed. A. Cramer, *Catena in Novum Testamentum*, VIII, 176–496.

4 For the codex tradition and edition of some of the works of Arethas see S. Kougeas, *Ὁ Καισαρείας Ἀρέθας καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ*, Athens, 1913, pp. 27–96, still the most complete and authoritative monograph on Arethas; also P. Karlin-Hayter *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae* CP, Bruxelles, *Byzantion*, 1970, pp. 200–202.

5 In Russian (Moscow, 1892).

6 Only in 1909 Papadopoulos-Kerameus published in his *Varia Graeca Sacra* (Petropolis) writings of Arethas from a newly found ms from the monastery of Eicosiphoenissa (Konitsa) and in 1913 S. Kougeas announced two more codices with works of Arethas (Marcianus 524, Ottavianus 147), until then unknown. *Ἀρέθας*, p. 28. It was Henri Grégoire who first drew Abel's and P. Karlin-Hayter's attention to the Moscow codex, as well as to *Vita Euthymii* which is the best source for the life of Arethas. See A. Abel, « La lettre polemique 'd'Aréthas' à l'Émir de Damas », *Byzantion* 24 (1954), p. 343 and K-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii*, pp. 1–3. There followed Romily J.H. Jenkins of the Dumbarton Oaks who edited a number of writings of Arethas and examined him as part of his study of the 9th and 10th c. Byzantium. A number of relevant studies by Jenkins have been published in one volume. *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries* (London, Variorum Reprints, 1970). With the death of both Grégoire and Jenkins, the most prominent student of Arethas has been. P. Karlin-Hayter with her two editions of *Vita Euthymii* (*Byzantion* 25–27 (1955–57) 1–172, and Bruxelles, 1970) and several studies of hers on Arethas (a list of them in the Bibliography of the *Vita* p. 250). M. Paul Orgels as of this moment has not published his study on Arethas which Karlin-Hayter announced in *Byzantion* 29–30 (1959–1960) p. 285. I have also been unable to locate another work by Orgels announced by A. Vasiliev (*Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. II, Brussels 1968, p. 412), as « La lettre a l'Émir de Damas' et son contexte historique », in *Byzantion* 38 (1968).

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 296–304. The Greek version of the Letter was published by J. Compennass, *Denkmäler der griechischen Volkssprache* (Bonn, P. Hanstein, 1913), pp. 1–9.

Πρὸς τὸν ἐν Δαμασκῶ ἀμυρᾶν  
προτροπῇ Ῥωμανοῦ βασιλέως.

As we know, Leo VI the Wise reigned between 886–912 while Romanos I Lekapenos, reigned between 920–944. Therefore we are, from the beginning, faced with a significant discrepancy which, as we will see later, is part of our consideration of the substance of the Letter.

The Letter received attention by A. Abel who studied and translated it into French in 1954.<sup>8</sup> Not totally unexpectedly for those who know his works, Abel has concluded that, on the basis of the stylistic character of the text, which is vulgar and does not coincide with the intellectual and linguistic finesse of Arethas, and of the historical discrepancies which the text reveals, this is not a writing of Arethas, but a product of later times.<sup>9</sup> The latest work on this Letter, that I am aware of, is that by Mrs. P. Karlin-Hayter.<sup>10</sup> In this work she has refuted Abel's theses, has treated the text as an authentic work of Arethas, written between 920–922, and has republished the Greek original version. Her study, however, has hardly answered all the questions that the reading of the text raises. Additionally, a recent and more careful edition of this and other Arethas' texts<sup>11</sup> compels us to reconsider and probe further into her answers. The matters which need reconsideration and refinement are, to my estimation and in order of significance, the following:

a) the reconciliation of the title with the historical references in the Letter;

8 "La Lettre", *Byzantion* 24 (1954), 343–370; French translation, pp. 355–370.

9 Abel has questioned various other writings of byzantine authors on Islam, such as the chapter 100/101 *On the Heresies* of John of Damascus (see Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 61–66), or «The refutation of a Hagarene» of Bartholomeos of Edessa, in *Studia Islamica* 37 (1973), 5–26, but, to my knowledge, he has attributed none of them definitely to any one particular author!

10 "Arethas' Letter to the Emir at Damascus", *Byzantion* 29–30 (1959–60), 281–302; Greek text, pp. 293–302. Khoury's chapter x of his *Les théologiens* pp. 217–234 is useful in that it summarizes the main literature on the subject, but it asks no new questions and does not face directly the problems that the text poses, since Khoury is not committed to its authenticity (p. 222).

11 More recently L.G. Westerink produced two volumes of Arethas' short writings as part of the prestigious series *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, under the title *Arethae Scripta Minora* (vol. I, Leipzig, 1968; vol. II, 1972). The "Letter to the Emir" is No. 26 in Vol. I, pp. 233, 234–245. Although basically identical, a careful comparison between Karlin-Hayter and Westerink's edition of the text reveals a few, but interesting, discrepancies. In the following pages I have used mostly Westerink's edition of the Letter, which I have contrasted to the codex, from a microfiche copy of it at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, which I have found more reliable than that used by Karlin-Hayter.

- b) the questions raised by the entire last paragraph of the text;
- c) the identification of the receiver of the Letter;
- d) the identification of Arethas' sources of Islamic faith and practice; and
- e) Arethas' general role in the Byzantine-Arab relations.

But, first, who is this Arethas? He was born in Patras, Peloponese, somewhere near the year 850.<sup>12</sup> Sometime between 886–895 Arethas left his birthplace for Constantinople, when the imperial throne was occupied by the learned Emperor Leo VI named for his literary and oratorical achievements as “the Wise” or “the Philosopher” (886–912), a man “with marked ecclesiastical and theological interests, but also with a tendency towards romancing”;<sup>13</sup> thence the tenth-century canonical and ecclesiastical dispute in Constantinople over the fourth marriage (Tetragamy) of Emperor, an issue which drew Arethas in the middle of this dispute! In Constantinople Arethas became student and colleague of the intellectual Patriarch Photios.<sup>14</sup>

Belatedly, around 895, he was ordained deacon and rather fast, by the year 901, he became Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia, ranking next only to the Patriarch of Constantinople himself. During his long tenure in this position he proved to be the most influential and controversial personality in the Tetragamy conflict between Emperor Leo VI and Patriarchs Nicholas Mysticos (901–907, 912–925) and Euthymios (907–912).<sup>15</sup> The intellectual metropolitan and student of Plato and Aristotle was willing to sacrifice his friendship with Nicholas Mysticos and their common relationship to Photios for the sake of the preservation of the canons and the traditions of the Church in the name

12 The proposed dates range from 848 to 865. Kougeas' arguments in favor of the date 850 (*Ἀρέθας*, pp. 1–2) have been accepted by K.-Hayter (*Vita*, pp. 202) and by P. Orgels [“En marge d' un text hagiographique (Vie de S. Pierre d'Argos, 19): la dernière invasion slave dans le Péloponnèse (923–925)”, *Byzantion* 34 (1964), 279, n.2]. The latter proposes the year 848 as the year of Arethas' birth.

13 G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1956), p. 215. Leo's “romancing” might have been but a tragic turn of his personal fate to have had no happy married life nor – and especially so – an heir to the throne, after three consecutive marriages.

14 Arethas must have arrived in Constantinople much earlier than 886 the year of Photios' death for his discipleship to Photios to be at all meaningful! K.-Hayter observes that “though the date of his arrival in CP is unknown, a remark in his *Ἀπολογία τοῖς ἐπισκόποις* is generally interpreted as meaning that he was in the capital before Basil's death”. *Vita*, p. 202. Basil I reigned between the years 867–886.

15 The best source for this chapter of the Byzantine history and for Arethas himself is the *Vita Euthymii* written by a contemporary, although not totally objective, witness to Patriarch Euthymios from his own monastic community. Incidents characteristic of the influential and most unyielding character of Arethas on the matter of Tetragamy can be found in the *Vita*, pp. 77–78.

of the contemplative and monastic new Patriarch Euthymios. Little is known of Arethas' relations with Euthymios. As Kougeas has remarked,<sup>16</sup> certainly in the *Vita Euthymii* must have been interesting details of Arethas' activities during the patriarchate of Euthymios but, at this point, a whole pamphlet from the *Vita* has been lost; an unfortunate coincidence that collaborates at obscuring from us whatever meagre information we have about Arethas! Reconciliation between Arethas and Nicholas Mysticos came about only in 921.

The last we hear of Arethas is around the year 932, canvassing for the election of Theophylactos, son of Romanos I Lakapenos, for the Patriarchal throne to which Theophylactos ascended on February 2nd, 933. Theophylactos was less than twenty years of age at the time! The story, according to K. Hayter,<sup>17</sup> is not above suspicion. It would be rather strange that a man who so vehemently objected to the violation of the Church rules regarding the fourth marriage, would allow such a violation regarding the age of ordination and especially the elevation of a young lad to the Patriarchal throne. Arethas himself was ordained deacon when he was at least thirty-eight years of age, and bishop at the age of at least fifty-six. The date of Arethas' death is placed on, or immediately after, 932.

### Political Experience and Involvement

Arethas was very active in the politics of the Byzantine Empire, including its relations with the Arab-Muslim world. Although there is still need for a closer scrutiny and a better understanding of his activities, there is no lack of evidence that his influence was significant in this area. As first bishop in order, Arethas was residing permanently in Constantinople the capital, at the heart of the administration of the ecclesiastical and political affairs. He seems to have been particularly aware of and affected by the struggles of the State with the Arabs. In three public speeches, which he delivered during royal dinners, Arethas referred to the pillage by the Saracens of Byzantine sites and cities, and praised the King for the determined struggles he had undertaken against them. These *Δημιουργοίαι* date between 901–902.<sup>18</sup> Kougeas also refers to a political mission of Arethas to Syria and Egypt ordered by Leo.<sup>19</sup> Also, among the authors

16 *Ἀρέθας*, 11–12.

17 *Vita*, 1970, p. 202.

18 Westerink, *Scripta Minora*, II, Nos 61, 62, 63; pp. 23–34.

19 *Ἀρέθας*, 19.

whose writings Arethas copied and on which he wrote scholia was Abū Qurra, including a number of treatises of his on Islam.<sup>20</sup>

But, perhaps, the most tangible and intriguing evidence of Arethas' dealing with Islam is the "Letter to the Emir at Damascus". This is, indeed, an uncharacteristic writing of Arethas which employs an excessively combative and abusive language, and contains uncritical statements. Its contextual and historical complexities are even more intriguing. Here is an outline of the main points of the Letter, with some of the questions and problems it raises:

1. The Letter, according to its title, is addressed "To the Emir of Damascus at the advice (or instigation) of Romanos the King". Yet, on the margin of the manuscript we read the note "ἰδιωτικῶς ἐξεδόθη τῇ φράσει εἰς σύνεσιν τῶν Σαρακηνῶν", which, freely translated reads, "this was published privately and with my own phraseology in order to bring the Saracens to their senses"! Is this, then, an official Letter to the Emir of Damascus, or a private polemic writing on Islam for the sake of the Christian populace?<sup>21</sup>

2. Acknowledgement of receiving previous correspondence from the Emir.

The Emir of Damascus in the title of the Letter is called *wazir*. Does Arethas know about the difference between the two titles? Who is this "emir" or "wazir"? Karlin-Hayter suggests that the original letter, which prompted this response, was written by Takin, who was emir at Damascus between 915–919 and who became governor of Egypt four times, 910–915, 919–921, 921, 924–933. However, as the identification of the receiver of the Letter is part of the particular reading of the Letter and of its dating it,<sup>22</sup> the matter cannot yet be considered closed.

3. An opening remark on Islam.

Arethas' definition of Islam is made in the following introductory statement:

But how did you venture to call the faith of the Saracens pure and immaculate, a faith which, as the Qur'an and the Furqan teaches you, has its order from Muhammad who has deceived you? Isn't that a faith full of

20 L.G. Westerink, "Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek MS 231", *Byzantion* 42 (1972), 196–244, *in passim*.

21 The Letter has all the characteristics of a point-by-point refutation of the most commonly debated issues between the two religions. But, as other writers used the technique of a dialogue with a fictitious Muslim (see John of Damascus, Abū Qurra, Bartholomeos of Edessa), we cannot exclude the possibility that Arethas used an hypothetical, or even an actual, correspondence with a Muslim prince to write a polemic treatise on Islam.

22 "Arethas' Letter", 287–288; Khoury, *Les théologiens*, 221–2.

filth that subjects you mostly to sexual acts with women and to many other shameful and improper deeds?<sup>23</sup>

This is hardly a complimentary introduction in a letter meant for an Emir on behalf of a Byzantine Emperor, even if the two were engaged in a most bitter war against each other!<sup>24</sup>

4. The truth and reliability of Christianity.

According to the author, the truth of Christianity is based on three evidences:

- the pre-announcement of Christ by prophets;
- the supernatural birth of Jesus and his miraculous deeds? and
- the success of the spread of Christianity “through poor and simple men, twelve in number.”<sup>25</sup>

The first two are frequent arguments in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature. Their frequency and intensity might have caused their rebuffing by the Muslims with reference to New Testament prophecies on the advent of Muhammad, and with the embellishment of his life with miracles.<sup>26</sup>

The third point is, to my knowledge, one expressed for the first time by Arethas. It sounds like a pre-emptive argument against the Muslim claim that the Arab military successes are a proof of God’s approval of them as Muslims, and of the truth of Islam.

5. On the Divinity of Jesus. A comparison between Jesus and Adam.

The Islamic claim that Adam also was “born” supernaturally without a mother, and yet he was not perceived as God, gives Arethas the opportunity to ridicule this Muslim logic, to compare the creation of Adam with the pre-eternal birth of Jesus, and to give a summary of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. This paragraph of the Letter yields interesting insights into the Muslim and Christian theological understanding of the “World-of-God” notion; more so, however, of the Christian than of the Muslim theology, which the author Christianizes.<sup>27</sup>

23 *Scripta Minora* I, 234: 7–12.

24 Abel (“La letter”, 347–8) compares this Letter to the “Refutation of the Letter of the Hagarenes” sent by Nicetas Paphlago I (PG 105: 808–841) in the name of Michael III (842–867), and to the Letter of Leo III (717–740) sent to ‘Umar (PG, 107: 315–324). However, neither the circumstances, nor the style of those responses can be compared to the same in Arethas’ Letter.

25 *Scripta Minora* I, 235: 1–3.

26 Daniel J. Sahas, “The formation of later Islamic doctrines as a response to Byzantine polemics: The miracles of Muhammad”, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982), 307–324 (see Chapter 4 in this volume).

27 The subtleties of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation evade even the attention of modern readers of the text, as a minor (?) misreading of the text indicates. The text at

#### 6. The divinity of Jesus. A comparison between Jesus and Ezekiel.

Another Muslim claim that Ezekiel also raised men from the dead and yet he was not perceived as God, gives Arethas the opportunity to explain the meaning of Ezekiel's prophecy<sup>28</sup> and its relationship to the restoration of Israel.

#### 7. Muslim misconceptions about the divinity of Jesus.

The literal Muslim understanding of the notions "birth" and "son of God" gives Arethas the opportunity to talk about the doctrine of the Trinity, and to criticize the Muslims for lack of theological sophistication and, even, of human reasoning! The Saracens, according to Arethas, are "full of passions" and, "unable to distinguish, with human reasoning, each nature"; they "perceive things which are referred to God from the point of view of their own uncleanness and impurity."<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to note that the nature and the being of God which the theology of the East had consistently affirmed as the mystery *par excellence*, Arethas seems to make it a matter of rational achievement! He rectifies this discrepancy later on when he asserts that God is revealed "through His Son, Lord Jesus Christ and God, who became incarnate ... who enlightens the mind of those who are of rational nature". He then turns to polemics: It is because the Saracens do not have him (Christ) in their hearts that they "live like blind men, unable to make a distinction between a divine and a human thing."<sup>30</sup>

#### 8. The veneration of the Cross.

To the Muslim accusation that the Christians venerate the cross and by doing so they equate it to Christ, Arethas counters, with a pointed reminder, that the Muslims venerate the mantle of Muhammad. Here a thesis is initiated on the reliability of Jesus and of Muhammad. For a Christian three things make Jesus reliable: the pre-announcements about him made by prophets; his virgin

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one point reads: "... the Son of God, in the womb of holy Mary, the virgin, took as material substance her pure blood and made a man, and dwelt *in him*, (καὶ ἐνώκησεν εἰς αὐτόν) and there was born of her a perfect man who, as Son of God, and even after this dwelling, was also perfect God". (*Scripta Minora* I, 235: 25–29). Karlin-Hayter, however, has read this crucial statement as "καὶ ἐνώκησεν εἰς αὐτήν" ("and dwelt *in her*", meaning Mary). This would have been a wording of a Nestorian rather than of an Orthodox, persuasion. I think that Westerink reads the text correctly (καὶ ἐνώκησεν εἰς αὐτόν). The affirmation that it was God who created from the blood of Mary a man and that she gave birth, bodily and humanly, to this man, is consistent with the Orthodox theology (Compare the wording of the Nicene Creed « ... he was incarnated by the Holy Spirit *and* the Virgin Mary and he became man »,), and it is phrased in the same way in other instances (see, for example, Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et amplissima Collectio*, 13: 256D).

28 Ez. 37:11–13.

29 *Scripta Minora*, I, 237:21–25.

30 *Ibid.*, 238:9–16.

birth; the miracles which he performed and those which are still taking place in his name. As for Muhammad, according to the author, none of these things can be shown. Arethas has only negative attributes to ascribe to Muhammad, carnal desires and passions, which led him to take the wife of his ... « friend Rasulallah »;<sup>31</sup> which has become the pattern in Muslim practice regarding divorce and re-marriage.<sup>32</sup>

In this comparison between Jesus and Muhammad the emphasis is, on the one hand on the “decent life (σεμνός βίος) of Jesus” and, on the other hand, on what is perceived to be an immoral life of Muhammad. “For how do you dare call Muhammad a prophet, a dirty and licentious man?”<sup>33</sup>

I have argued that in an early stage of Byzantine-Muslim polemics the Muslims attempted to compare Muhammad to Jesus after embellishing the life of Muhammad with miracles. When the Christians were faced with a barrage of miracles of Muhammad they resorted to an attack against his personality and morality:

It is clear that by the end of the ninth century the Muslim piety had reached the point in which Muhammad compared satisfactorily to Jesus, in terms of signs and miracles. With such a record, the challenge now returns to the Christians to prove that Muhammad is inferior to Jesus. Thus, the process of the Christianization of Muhammad and the Islamization of Jesus has been completed. The attack against the personality and morality of Muhammad begins.<sup>34</sup>

This statement seems to find a justification in Arethas.

#### 9. Defence of the divinity of Jesus.

Against the divinity of Jesus the Muslims produce three arguments: First, the question of his crucifixion. Was Jesus crucified willingly or unwillingly? If

31 A flagrant distortion of the story of Muhammad's cousin Zaid, as well as a total confusion of Zaid with Muhammad himself (*Rasul Allah = prophet of God*).

32 Abel and Karlin-Hayter have mistaken this point to refer to the practice of *muhailil*, while Arethas actually is referring to the situation when a woman, once divorced, has to be married by someone else and divorced by him, before being allowed to be taken back again by her first husband. It seems that this legislation, by the time of Arethas, was fulfilled by professional “husbands” who were willing to “marry” for a fee a divorced woman and release her in order for her to be taken back by her original husband. This is the practice of *tahlil* (“making lawful). See Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 121–2. Arethas refers to these paid husbands as “cleaners”, as the Muslims themselves call them; an important information on Muslim life and customs in the 10th century.

33 *Scripta Minora* I, 239: 13–14.

34 “The formation of later Islamic Doctrines”, p. 318.



he was crucified willingly, the implication is that the Jews are worthy of praise rather than of reproach for having fulfilled the will of God! If he was crucified unwillingly, Jesus cannot be believed as God for having been defeated and killed by men! This has been a popular argument in the early history of the Muslim-Christian dialogue;<sup>35</sup> Arethas' expansion on this argument indicates that this was a prominent one in the 10th century.<sup>36</sup> Second, the quotation from John 20:17 where Jesus addresses God as his Father and as our Father, his God and our God. Third, the case of Joshua, who made the sun stop still until his victory was made complete and yet, in spite of the demonstration of such supernatural power, he was not considered to be God. Arethas refutes each one of these arguments by using a dialectical method and resorting to rational proofs.

#### 10. Military successes and religious truth.

According to Arethas, the Muslims claim that their military victories prove the truthfulness of Islam and God's approval of the Arabs as Muslims. In refuting this logic Arethas appears to be contradicting himself. First, he seems to acknowledge the military superiority demonstrated by the Arabs, although immediately he reverses the meaning of the admission to indicate that it is the Christians, the defeated ones, who are the ones loved by God, "for the Lord reproves him whom he loves".<sup>37</sup> But then he resorts to a litany of recent (?) Byzantine victories over the Arabs in order to show that these are spelling the end of the Muslim hegemony. He mentions, specifically, the Carmatian insurrection against the Sunni Caliphate (most probably that of Dhikrawih al-Dindani in 900/1),<sup>38</sup> a very interesting reference to the contemporary history of Islam; the Byzantine victory of Andronicos Doukas and Eustathios Argyros, in November/December 904; and the naval victory of Himerios, on October 5, 905.

This is the most interesting and, at the same time, problematic paragraph of the Letter. The author enumerates actually three events in a chronological order, all three taking place within the same period of time. Why not, then, the

35 One can notice a progressive elaboration and articulation of the argument beginning with Abū Qurra (PG, 37: 1592 A–B) and then with John of Damascus (*Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol IV, Berlin, W. de Gruyter, pp. 431–432).

36 This Muslim argument is not new and it has persisted long after Arethas. In 1355 Gregory Palamas reports on a similar Muslim claim, to which he gives a similar answer. Daniel J. Sahas, "Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 25 (1980) pp. 427–9 (see Chapter 29 in this volume).

37 Prov. 3:12.

38 L. Massignon, «Karmatians», *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. by H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1965, 218–223; H. Grégoire «Les Carmates (Qarmates)» *Byzantion* 8 (1933), 773–775.

Letter to have been written immediately after these victories? If it were written much later after these events, why does it not mention the subsequent defeats of the Byzantines at the hands of the Muslims, like the revolt of Andronicos Doukas himself and his defect to the Hagarenes (905) only a few months after his victory, and even the disastrous defeat of Himerios himself in 911, after which Himerios died in disgrace as a prisoner? If the Letter was written immediately after these defeats, how reliable and valid would Arethas' argument have been, having failed to mention them? But if the Letter was written soon after the Byzantine victories (904–905) that is, during the reign of Leo VI, how reliable can the title of the Letter be, stating that the Letter was written “προτροπή Ῥωμανοῦ ...”, since Romanos was not crowned Emperor but fifteen years after the last of the victories mentioned (920)? Indeed, this paragraph concludes with a statement that implies that the situation continues being bad, militarily, for the Muslims: “At any rate, we hope that your time has about come and that you are to be vanquished completely.”<sup>39</sup>

If this section of the Letter, containing the historical references, cannot be reconciled with the title of the Letter, which mentions the name of Emperor Romanos (Lakapenos, 920–944), it is then the reliability of the *title* that must be questioned; neither that of this paragraph, which is an integral part of the text of the Letter, nor that of the Letter as a whole! Furthermore, this chronological discrepancy between the title and the body of the text must make us rethink the question of the date of the Letter. It may perhaps belong to the period of Leo VI (886–912), while the address may be explained otherwise. Popov read the name (perhaps not unconsciously) as “Roman” rather than Romanos. This suggestion contradicts the clear reading of the particular manuscript, *if* one has to take this address as absolutely reliable and derived from the hand of Arethas. My inclination is to suggest that the title of the Letter is a later addition, as well as an editorial blunder – something which is not unusual in other short writings of Arethas.<sup>40</sup> There might be also another explanation

39 *Scripta Minora* I, 243:17–18.

40 Kougeas has suggested that the first compiler of the short writings of Arethas must have been someone very close to Arethas who knew the events implied in them precisely, but who was inexperienced in composing this collection. At times “he places a title which is the least corresponding to their content”. *Ἀρέθας*, p. 31. A clear case is that of a funeral poem to his sister, which Arethas wrote while he was still a deacon and which bears the title “Ἀρέθα διακόνου, γεγονότος δὲ καὶ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Καισαρείας Καππαδοκίας, ἐπὶ τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἀδελφῇ”, showing him already as an Archbishop of Caesarea! It is clear that this particular title of the poem, or at least part of it, (... γεγονότος δὲ καὶ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Καισαρείας Καππαδοκίας ...) cannot be of Arethas himself.

to this discrepancy, which is corroborated by what we will mention below in item # 13.

11. A critique of the Muslim teaching on Paradise.

Arethas ridicules the Muslims for their materialistic, carnal and sensuous perception of Paradise and uses the opportunity to launch a stinging attack at the Muslim life-style:

Thus you and your paradise are full of excrements and stink. Where, then, are you going to find so much perfume in order to anoint yourselves with, as you are doing now in this life, which is corruptible?<sup>41</sup>

We have here another allusion to a secularized Islam in an affluent age; something which explains the Carmatian revolt and the Sufi resurgence.

12. The meaning and the purpose of the Incarnation.

It is not unusual that a Christian treatise or sermon may end on an eschatological note, with a reference to the Christian teaching of redemption and the belief in the resurrection; this text is no exception. While in all previous instances the author seems to respond to a stated Muslim position, this penultimate – actually concluding – paragraph seems to generate a question for the sake of coming to a didactic conclusion. Thus, the paragraph begins with a conditional tone: "And if you enquire, what was the need for God to become man, listen to this".<sup>42</sup> This might show that the Letter is rather an apologetic treatise aiming at a Christian audience, rather than a response to a Muslim by correspondence – a possibility strongly supported by the wording of the closing remark of the Letter.

13. Closing of the Letter.

The last paragraph of the Letter is perhaps the most problematic of all. It reads as follows:

That, with regard to *their* irrationalities. As to the rest that is, what *they* have babbled about the exchange of prisoners, the response, administration and defense of such matters, these belong to you (*ὑμῶν*; another reading: to us- *ἡμῶν*) who have been appointed for this purpose by the benevolent king.<sup>43</sup>

41 *Scripta Minora* I, 244: 11–14.

42 *Ibid.*, 244: 15–16.

43 *Scripta Minora* I, 245: 11–14.

Why this abrupt change from the second to the third person? How could this paragraph be part of a letter that up to this point has been addressing directly one particular recipient, namely the “Emir at Damascus”? Then there is that crucial *ὁ/ἡμῶν*. Does the matter of exchange of prisoners and political negotiations belong to the author of the Letter or to some other third person? The ms. clearly has it *ὁμῶν*; which implies that someone else, appointed by the king, is responsible for the political negotiations with the Arabs. Karlin-Hayter has noted the ms. and she has conscientiously corrected the text to *ἡμῶν*<sup>44</sup> (“to us”), which implies that the author himself is to be the responsible agent for a theological response to the Emir as well as for the political negotiations with the Arabs. But this reading of the paragraph makes very little grammatical and contextual sense. Westerink has consciously left the text unedited to read *ὁμῶν*, which is grammatically and contextually consistent with the meaning of the entire statement; unless this whole paragraph is a latter interpolation.

If, indeed, the last paragraph of the text is an integral part of the “Letter” (and now we may want to qualify this text as a so-called “Letter to the Emir at Damascus”), and given that there is no salutation, or any other feature of a correspondence at the end, as it is the case with the beginning of the “Letter”, we may want to consider the possibility that this is a briefing paper on Islam written by Arethas for the sake of some byzantine official, engaged in political negotiations and exchange of prisoners with the Arabs; which brings me to my conclusions – very tentative though these may be at this point:

1. I see no serious problem in accepting this writing as being of Arethas,<sup>45</sup> as long as there is no evidence that *the entire* Arethas collection of the 16th c. Moscow Codex 315 is spurious.
2. The text belongs to an earlier date than it has been suggested by Orgels, Karlin-Hayter and especially Abel; perhaps as early as 905.
3. The document (a probable response to an actual Muslim official) seems to have been retrieved and used later as a briefing paper on matters of Muslim faith by a byzantine negotiator with the Arabs. This negotiator may be Choïrosphactes himself who was in Baghdad in 905–6 negotiating peace and exchange of prisoners with the Arabs. These negotiations gave fruit in July/August 908.<sup>46</sup>
4. The present title of the Letter cannot be considered as an integral part of the text and it might have come about either by another use of the text

44 “Arethas’ Letter”, 302:13.

45 Romily J.H. Jenkins has attributed this writing to Leo Choïrosphactes. “Leo Choïrosphactes and the Saracen Vizier”, in his *Studies*, No XI.

46 J. Karayannopoulos, *Ἱστορία τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ Κράτους*, vol. II, (Thessaloniki, 1981) p. 330.

during Romanos' times, or by a blunder of its editor. In either case, the title seems to be less important than the body of the text itself in identifying either the author or the date of the text. Popov's assumption, although precarious and unwarranted vis-à-vis the unquestionable reading of the present codex, cannot be dismissed outright, given the fact that this early 10th c. text comes to us only from a single sixteenth-century manuscript! Editorial corruption from an earlier manuscript reading *Ῥωμαίου* rather than *Ῥωμανοῦ*, should not be ruled out.

5. And, finally, a closer reading of the text and a clarification of its intricacies present us with a more complex situation of Byzantine-Arab relations, than either Abel or Karlin-Hayter have detected.

## Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) on Islam

At the beginning of 1354 Gregory Palamas (1296–1360), Archbishop of Thessalonica and the leader of the hesychasts,<sup>1</sup> was travelling from Thessalonica to the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The purpose of this trip was to bring about reconciliation between the young self-exiled heir to the throne, John v Palaeologos (1341–1391), and the Grand Domestic John Cantacuzenos, who, upon the death of Andronicos III Palaeologos in 1341, had proclaimed himself emperor – an event that sparked even another civil war in fourteenth-century Byzantium. The trip was undertaken on the initiative of John Palaeologos<sup>2</sup> and his mother Empress Ann of Savoy who, fully aware of Palamas' sympathies towards Cantacuzenos,<sup>3</sup> was nevertheless respectful of his integrity, theological soundness and statesmanship.

Palamas, travelling on a royal boat, made the first stop of his journey at the island of Tenedos, where he received further instructions. Upon leaving Tenedos on another ship, a fierce storm forced the captain to seek refuge near Kallipolis, on the European side of the straits. Kallipolis had just suffered from a severe earthquake which had left the city almost in ruins and facilitated its capture by the Osmanli Turks from the Asiatic side of the straits. The boat was taken over by the Turks who demanded ransom for their release. Communication with the imperial administration was impaired and, as no ransom was yet offered, a period of captivity began which was to take Palamas and the members of the entourage through a number of cities of North-Western Asia Minor, or Anatolia. Palamas' captivity lasted for over one year, from March 1354 to July 1355.

Palamas found in these former Byzantine strongholds not only sizeable Christian communities, but also Muslims who were eager to debate with him

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1 Of the extensive bibliography on Palamas, one of the older studies should be mentioned, namely the work of Gregory Papamichael, *Ho Hagios Grēgorios Palamas, Archiepiskopos Thessalonikis* (St. Petersburg and Alexandria, 1911); among more recent titles, the works of John Meyendorff, an authority on Palamas and the Palamite theology, deserve special attention, particularly his *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: The Faith Press, 1964; French original, Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1959), and *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974).

2 Philotheos, *Encomion* in Migne, *P.G.*, CLI, col. 626A (on Philotheos' work see notes 4 and 5 below). For the outcome of the struggle between Cantacuzenos and John v Palaeologos see below note 44.

3 For the events of the Civil War and the political and religious complexities of Byzantine society at the time, see George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), pp. 454–75, and Meyendorff, *A Study of Palamas*, pp. 63ff.

matters of religious persuasion. Palamas describes three such encounters: one with Ishmael, the grandson of the Great Emir Orkhan; a *Dialexis*, or debate, with a selective group of Jewish converts to Islam, identified as “Chiones”; and a dialogue with a Muslim imam in Nicaea. The events which led to his captivity, his journey through the conquered Christian cities, his contacts with the Christians, his impression of the Turks and his debates with Muslims, Palamas himself<sup>4</sup> describes in a rather lengthy pastoral letter<sup>5</sup> which he most likely wrote in Nicaea toward the end of his captivity and which was addressed to the Christians of his Archdiocese.<sup>6</sup> This letter, which only lately became known

4 Philotheos, Patriarch of Constantinople (1354–55, 1364–76) who is the main source of information of Palamas’ life, gives only a minimal account of the captivity; Migne, *P.G.*, CLI, cols. 626–27.

5 The letter is known from various manuscripts. The Athonite ms. of St. Panteleimon Monastery, No. 215, was copied by A. Adamantios on August 3, 1895 at the instruction of Sp. Lambros who verified the accuracy of the transcript, and published by K. Dyovouniotes in *Neos Hellenomnemon* (Athens), XVI (1922), 7–21 (hereafter referred to as *Letter*). A second manuscript of the letter is in Codex 1379 of the National Library of Athens, between leaves 408b–415b; cf. A.I. Sakkelion in *Soter* (Athens) xv (1892), 238. A third manuscript is that of Codex No. 2409 of the National Library of Paris mentioned by M. Treu (*Deltion of the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece* [Athens], III [1889], 227) on information from notes in Fabricius’ Library. Cf. Migne, *P.G.*, CL, cols. 777–78 (VI). A fourth manuscript appears to be that of the Parisian Codex Coislin No. 97 & 98; Migne, *P.G.*, CL, col. 808 (LXVI). It seems that Philotheos had originally included in his extensive *Encomion* (Migne, *P.G.*, CLI, cols. 551–656) the text of the letter itself, or that he was at least aware of its content, namely “the struggles of the captivity ... and the victories ... and the triumphs over the error” – a fair summary of what the letter is all about. The edition of Migne has omitted the letter from the *Encomion* (cf. *P.G.*, CLI, col. 626B–C: “Thus in the letter to his own Church he is writing the following: ...”). To our knowledge there has been no serious challenge to the authenticity of the letter; even M. Jugie does not press the issue beyond raising it as an open question: “A plusieurs reprises, il a l’occasion d’exposer aux musulmans les mystères de la Trinité et de l’Incarnation, comme il le raconte lui-même dans une lettre adressée à son Église, si toutefois la pièce est authentique”; *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, XI (Paris, 1932), 1740 (our italics). For an English translation of the *Letter* with the *Dialexis* see Daniel J. Sahas, “Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* xxv (1981), 409–36 (see Chapter 29 in this volume). For a French translation with an extensive Introduction and Commentary see Anna Phillipidis-Braat, “La captivité de Palamas chez les Turcs; Dossier et commentaire,” *Travaux et Mémoires*, VII (1979), 109–221. I received this work too late to be able to include its findings in this article.

6 Two manuscripts indicate in their titles that Palamas “sent this letter to his Church from Asia while captive.” The Parisian one has it that Palamas “... wrote this letter...” The letter was, indeed written in Nicaea and most likely sent to Thessalonica after Palamas’ release and his arrival in Constantinople. It is otherwise difficult to explain how such a long letter, containing very negative and at times harsh derogatory expressions against the Turks and their religion, would have been allowed to leave Anatolia and how it could have reached Thessalonica safely.

and studied in some depth,<sup>7</sup> is of great interest to Byzantinists, historians of the Osmanli Turks and historians of Muslim-Christian relations.

Of equal interest is Palamas' debate, or *Dialexis*, with the Chiones, recorded by an eye and ear witness, Taronites, a Christian physician in the service of Emir Orkhan. The letter "to his own Church"<sup>8</sup> and Taronites' script of the *Dialexis*<sup>9</sup> are two significant documents which describe in an eloquent way the Archbishop's own experience of, and his dialogue with, the Muslim Turks.

While his views of and discussion with the Turks are the primary concern of this article, the major events of Palamas' captivity will be presented first, providing some idea of the context in which these discussions took place.

## 1 The Events of the Captivity

The fall of Kallipolis<sup>10</sup> marks the establishment of the sovereignty of Ottoman Turks on European soil, which eventually led to the conquest of Constantinople itself one hundred years later. As stated above, the fall of Kallipolis is often seen as related to a major earthquake, reported by different sources. The most explicit account is given in a chronicle written by an anonymous writer in 1391:

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7 The credit of drawing attention to the existence and to the historical significance of this letter belongs to G. Georgiades Arnakis in his *Hoi Prōtoi Othōmanoi*, No. 41 of the *Beihefte* of the *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* (Athens, 1947) where he lists all three documents related to Palamas' activity (p. 204); see also "Gregory Palamas among the Turks and documents of his Captivity as Historical Sources," *Speculum*, XXVI (1951), 104–18. The letter was unknown even to Papamichael, who, although he mentions the *Dialexis* and a letter of Palamas about his captivity to David Disypatos, makes no reference to the letter to the Thessalonians, cf. bibliography of sources in his *St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 142.

8 Or, according to the ms. of the National Library of Athens, "to his own Church, the bishops and the presbyters and the people." *Soter* xv (1892), 238.

9 Published by A.I. Sakkellion in *Soter* xv (1892), 240–46, from ms. No. 1379 of the National Library of Athens, f. 415b–418a.

10 Demetrios Cydones, the famous Byzantine scholar-theologian, wrote an "Advisory speech on Kallipolis, demanded by Murat" (Migne, *P.G.*, CLIV, cols. 1009–1036). In it he defends the thesis that the Byzantines must resist the demands of Murat to deliver the city, in spite of its weakness after the exodus of the population and the destruction of its fortification because of the earthquake. "We always considered it [Kallipolis] to be the most precious of all our possessions," he writes (col. 1012B), and he reminds the Byzantines that although itself small, Kallipolis protected the greatest metropolis, that is Constantinople (col. 1024D).



On March 2, 6862 (1354), the seventh indiction, the night of the feast of Orthodoxy, during the reign of John Cantacuzenos, a violent earthquake took place. The walls of Kallipolis and the surrounding towns collapsed, and for sins that God knows, were surrendered to the Turks.<sup>11</sup>

This date has been challenged by Arnakis, who, reversing his earlier position,<sup>12</sup> suggested 1355 as the year of the earthquake, the fall of Kallipolis and, in the same year and month, the beginning of Palamas' captivity, basing this on the assumption that only a fortnight – rather than a whole winter – lapsed between Palamas' appearance at Orkhan's summer resort and his disputation with the Chiones. Since P. Charanis has convincingly shown the erroneous nature of this assumption,<sup>13</sup> we hold to the March 2, 1354 date for the earthquake, the fall of Kallipolis immediately after, and Palamas' arrest at this city's nearby shore "a few days after," following the storm from Tenedos "during night and winter time."<sup>14</sup>

Palamas defines the general territory of his captivity as the Anatolian provinces of Bithynia and Mesothenia, and refers to cities across the coastal area of Propontis on the Asiatic side of the straits, most of which had recently fallen into the hands of the Osmanli Turks, whom he calls Achaemenids.<sup>15</sup> It does not

11 P. Charanis, "An Important Short Chronicle of the Fourteenth Century," *Byzantion* XIII (1938), 347. The chronicle has been published by Joseph Müller, "Byzantinische Analekten," *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philologisch-Historische Klasse IX* (Vienna, 1852), 336–419.

12 *Hoi Prōtoi Othōmanoi*, p. 201. For his later view see his article in *Speculum* XXVI (1951), 11–12, and his "Gregory Palamas, the Chiones and the fall of Gallipoli," *Byzantion* XXII (1952), 310ff.

13 "On the date of the Occupation of Gallipoli by the Turks," *Byzantinoslavica* XVI (1955), 113–17. Cf. also below, note 24.

14 *Letter*, p. 9.

15 *Letter*, p. 9: "... since that earthquake had placed that city [Kallipolis], too, under the Achaemenids, whom we now call Turks." "Achaemenids" is a term by which the Persians were known. It is the name of an ancient dynasty of Persian kings that came to an end with Alexander the Great's victory over their last ruler in 330 BC. In AD 226 Artaxerxes, claiming to be a descendant of those kings, assumed the title, revitalized the ancient religion of Zoroaster and began claiming the territories which were part of the kingdom of Darius, seven centuries earlier. Artaxerxes' claim posed a serious threat for the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the third century AD: the Persians were the old time adversaries of the Greeks and later of the Byzantines. The ferocity of the Turks as well as the general geographical area of their advances made the equation Achaemenids-Turks plausible for the Byzantines. The struggle between the Byzantines and the Persians was viewed by many as a struggle between faith in God and unbelief. (Consider the struggles of Heraclius with the Persians and the events related to the conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians, and the subsequent capture and recovering of the cross.) Ironically enough, the

seem that he travelled in the inland of Anatolia, whose Christian and Muslim communities were therefore not known to him.<sup>16</sup>

The captives were taken to Lampsakos, across from Kallipolis on the Asiatic side of the straits, where they were initially subjected to harsh physical and mental treatment. Palamas appears most indignant of the manners of the Turks who were interested only in raising the ransom price for their Christian captives. It is at this juncture that he gives his first and very uncomplimentary “impression of their ways”; in general, Palamas’ view on Islam must be understood in the light of these early and extremely unhappy experiences of his captivity. His stay in Lampsakos lasted for seven days after which a most painful three-day journey followed to Pegae, a coastal city east of Lampsakos, near Parium. The city, which had been pillaged and desolated by the Turks,<sup>17</sup> had become a refuge for uprooted Christian populations. Palamas refers to “monks and lay people living about the church – pleasant harbors on the opposite side for those who were ending up there from captivity – from whom we, too, received no less comfort.”<sup>18</sup> The captives were allowed to settle among their co-religionists in the Christian quarter of the city. This, however, must not be seen as a measure of freedom but as a policy of expediency on the part of the Turks: the impoverished Christian community was made responsible for the support of the Christian captives. Palamas writes:

I ... and all the others who were with me were offered hospitality by Mavrozoumis, who was different from all the rest in kindness. He was an heteriarch. He gave us shelter; when we were naked he clothed us, when we were hungry he gave us food and when we were thirsty he gave us drink. He actually nourished us for almost three months.<sup>19</sup>

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Qur’an itself portrays this struggle as one between faith and unbelief, and it predicts that the Byzantines, as the force of faith, will ultimately be victorious; *Sūrat al-Rūm* (30): 1–5.

16 Of particular interest regarding the history of Anatolia during the period under study is the work of Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

17 Cf. Vryonis, *Decline* pp. 242, 254 n. 687.

18 *Letter*, p. 11. In the early fourteenth century Parium was given to the Bishop of Pegae because of the poverty of the latter. In the same year that Palamas arrived at Pegae (1354), its bishop, by a decision of the council of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, received the metropolitanate of Sozopolis as an *epidosis*, i.e., for support. The statement dealing with that grant gives a grim picture of a city “that has been reduced into nothing and it is unrecognizable even by its remnants,” and where “its most pious bishop is in need of even the bare necessities of livelihood.” Fr. Miklosich and Jos. Müller, *Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani*, I (Vindobonae: Carolus Gerold, 1860), 330.

19 *Letter*, p. 11. The “Great Heteriarch” in the imperial court was the officer responsible for receiving guests and those who were fleeing to the imperial court, especially the

From there, presumably by the end of June, the captives were taken to Prusa (Bursa),<sup>20</sup> in a journey that lasted for four days.<sup>21</sup> They stayed in Prusa for only two days, and, in another two-day journey, were led to the summer resort of the Great Emir, where they must have arrived in the first part of July. It is not clear from the letter where this resort is located. From its description as a hilly place with cool weather “even during the summer,”<sup>22</sup> one can gather that it was in the nearby Mount Olympus area. After an initial dialogue between Palamas and Ishmael, the emir’s grandson, Palamas and the captives were brought “before the presence of the ruler” on that same evening. Palamas does not tell us how long he and his company remained at the summer resort, but one must assume that this was only a short and somewhat formal visit between the supporter of the troubled Byzantine Emperor and his Muslim son-in-law (Orkhan was married to Theodora, the daughter of Cantacuzenos).

By the middle of July and at the command of Orkhan – obviously as a friendly gesture – Palamas was led from the emir’s summer resort to still another unidentified place. This is how Palamas describes his residence in this place:

At his [Orkhan’s] command we were led to the neighboring town which had been inhabited by Roman Christians for a long time and in which there was also a residence for the royal ambassadors. We were meeting with them [the Roman Christians] ... day after day receiving from them provisions and some consolation. The roughness and the severe cold weather of the place, as well as the needs of the necessary goods for those

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foreigners and friends among them. Cf. D. Du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis* (Vratislaviae, 1891), I, col. 439. It seems that Mavrozoumis was given a similar responsibility with regard to the Greek captives or refugees who arrived at Pegae. Such an heteriarch in Anatolia had, perhaps, additional duties, such as being the spokesman of the local Greek population to the Osmanli authorities. Arnakis characterizes Mazvrouzoumis as “a collaborationist Byzantine general, ... [whose] name ... should be added to those of Köse-Mikhal, Evrenos, and Markos – prominent Greeks who threw in their lot with the rising star of the Osmanlis”; *Speculum*, xxvi (1951), 115.

20 The city had capitulated to Orkhan on April 6, 1326. Cf. H. İnalcık, “The Emergence of the Ottomans” in the *Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), I, 268–74.

21 One may note here that the journey from Lampsakos to Pegae lasted for three days, while the one from Pegae to Prusa – at least three times the distance – lasted for four days. That particular journey from Lampsakos to Pegae Palamas characterized as a most painful one: “Even if I wanted to tell you in detail the sufferings of this journey, neither the ink nor the paper that I have now available would suffice. [On arrival at Pegae] ... we were utterly exhausted from the walk and from what they did to us during the journey.... *Letter*, p. 11.

22 *Letter*, p. 12.

in my company who were sick, did not succeed in destroying the good will of those men.<sup>23</sup>

On reading this passage closely and its reference to the “roughness and severe cold weather of the place” one gains the impression that Palamas spent most (if not all) of the winter of that year (1354–55) in the “place of the ambassadors.”<sup>24</sup> There are some indications that this place was also the winter residence of Orkhan. Palamas narrates that when Orkhan fell sick from a liver ailment, the Christian physician, Taronites, mentioned above, was called upon to treat him. The story seems to imply that Taronites was summoned to that “place of the ambassadors.” It was on this occasion that Taronites spoke to Orkhan about the reputation of Palamas and his competence in theological debates, and that he requested his transfer to Nicaea. As Palamas writes:

The latter [the emir] asked him about me saying, “who and what kind of man is this monk?” And when he answered whatever he answered, the emir said, “I too, have wise and reputable men who would engage in a dialogue with him.”<sup>25</sup>

The exchange or *Dialexis* of Palamas with Orkhan’s own “wise and reputable men,” known as “Chiones,” is a subject of its own, with which we will deal shortly. But at this point we must be reminded of Arnakis’ informative suggestion that:

it is probable that the Christian town was deliberately chosen as the scene of the disputation in order to impress the Byzantine ambassadors

23 *Letter*, p. 13. One might suggest that this place was either Nicomedeia, or Pythia, or possibly Pylae. It was in Nicomedeia that Cantacuzenos proposed to meet with Orkhan to settle their difference regarding Kallipolis, a meeting which Orkhan failed to attend alleging illness (something which Palamas’ letter seems to support when it refers to the ill health of Orkhan). Cf. Arnakis in *Speculum*, xxvi (1951), 112. In the late Byzantine period, at least before 1300, the areas along the coast between Chalcedon and Nicomedeia as well as the coast southwest of Nicomedeia, in what is known as Pythion, included imperial residences. I owe this information to Prof. G. Walker of the Department of Geography, York University.

24 Arnakis seems to have underestimated this passage when he insists that between Palamas’ appearance before Orkhan and the discussion with the Chiones “there was at least a fortnight’s interval”; in *Speculum*, xxvi (1951), 111, and in *Byzantion* xxii (1952), 310. Arnakis’ calculation makes Palamas’ captivity a short one (from the spring of 1355 to July of the same year), something that contradicts not only the internal evidence of the letter, but also the explicit statement of Philotheos that Palamas and his fellow-captives spent “a full year ... in captivity.” Migne, *P.G.*, cLi, col. 627A. Cf. also above, note 13.

25 *Letter*, p. 14.

who resided there by demonstrating the inferiority of the Christian religion, represented, as it was, by the leading Greek theologian, who was then at the mercy of the Turks.<sup>26</sup>

Who are, then, these *Chiones*? The question has been debated primarily between Arnakis and P. Wittek. Arnakis maintains that Chiones – the name being a distortion and hellenization of *al-akhiyān* – were none others than the Akhis: a militant religious group “contemporary with the growth of the Ottoman state and undoubtedly one of the main factors that brought it about.”<sup>27</sup> P. Wittek, objecting to Arnakis’ thesis, suggests that the word could more successfully be linked to *ākhōnd* which means “teacher” or “theologian.” The Chiones, therefore, are “Muslim theologians.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore P. Wittek suggests that there is an inherent evolution from *chionas* (sing. of *chiones*) or *chionades* to *choggias* – one of the various forms which the Middle Greek produced from the Persian-Turkish *khoja*, ‘master’, ‘teacher’, ‘clergyman’.<sup>29</sup>

Arnakis has rebuffed Wittek’s arguments and has reaffirmed his belief that *Chiones* is a corrupted derivative of the plural *akhiyān*, usually denoting the Akhi community, or a group of representative individuals belonging to the Brotherhood.<sup>30</sup> What both Arnakis and Wittek seem not to have taken into account are two matters. First, that the Chiones were Muslim converts of Jewish origin. They themselves make this disclosure, and Palamas had the same information from other sources.<sup>31</sup> Second (and this is implied rather than explicitly stated), that these Chiones appear to be Greek-speaking. There is no indication that Palamas used a translator in conversing with them, as was

26 In *Byzantion* XXII (1952), 309.

27 In *Speculum* XXVI (1951), 114. For a more extensive discussion and bibliography on the subject see his *Prōtoi Othōmanoi*, pp. 110–24.

28 “Chiones,” *Byzantion* XXI (1951), 122. Interestingly enough, Arnakis himself describes in his *Prōtoi Othōmanoi*, p. 18, the Chiones as “Ottoman theologians.”

29 In *Byzantion* XXI (1951), 123. Du Cange (*Glossarium*, II, col. 1752) gives as the meaning of the word *Chionadēs*: *Legis doctor, apud Persas, seu Turkos* but he did not know the Akhis, and simply attributed to the Chiones “a meaning that was more or less apparent from the context.” It must be noted that Du Cange’s sources for the word are Palamas’ *Letter* and his contemporary, George Chrysophocas. The common – not necessarily most learned – opinion is that the Chiones were *Turcarum doctores*, as Combesius notes in Migne, *P. G.*, CLI, col. 722, n. 3.

30 In *Byzantion* XXII (1952), esp. 306ff.

31 “We were taught ten commandments which Moses brought down, written on slates of stone. We also know that the Turks maintain the same. We left, therefore, the faith which we were holding before, came to them and we became Turks, too.” Cf. also Palamas’ reaction: “I will not be responding to the Chiones. For they, from what I heard about them before and from what they are now saying, seem to be Jews, ... not Muslims; and my talk now is not to the Jews.” *Soter* XV (1892), 241.

the case later with the *tasimanes* in Nicaea. The Chiones were not only eager, but insisted not to converse with Palamas in the presence of Orkhan. When at the end of the disputation they apparently had been defeated, one of them insulted and even assaulted the Archbishop physically. It is obvious that their reputation and their alliance with Orkhan were secure as long as their competence in matters of faith was not challenged and the question of their loyalty to the Ottomans was not raised – both of which their dialogue with Palamas did. The *Dialexis* seems to give the impression that the religious differences between the Chiones and the Ottoman Muslims were sharper and more decisive than the Chiones had claimed or had Orkhan believe. Palamas seems to treat the Chiones with some contempt, possibly because he had no sympathy for people who became converts to any religion for reasons of personal convenience and expediency. For Palamas the Chiones were:

men who had studied and had been taught by Satan nothing else but blasphemies and shameful things about our Lord Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>32</sup>

As it becomes evident in these documents, Arnakis writes,

religion was one of the main concerns of the Osmanlis. From Gregory's epistle we gather that, from Orhan's grandson down to the last hangers-on at the Eastern gate of Nicaea, they were keenly aware of the significance of the struggle going on between Christianity and Islam. It was a struggle of succession to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>33</sup>

The disputation<sup>34</sup> of Palamas with the Chiones took place in front of "a number of [Turkish] officials and someone called Palapanes."<sup>35</sup> As Taronites himself states, "this exchange took place in the month of July, on the eighth indiction of the year 6863 [1355]." There is no compelling reason to doubt the reliability of

32 *Letter*, p. 14.

33 *Speculum* xxvi (1951), 114. In the search for the identity of the Chiones one may wonder whether they are at all related to those whom Vryonis (*Decline*, p. 176) describes as *mixobarbaroi hellēnizontes*, people of mixed marriages, Turks and Christians, who spoke Greek although they were Muslims. One could also raise the question whether the term "Chiones" might be related to the name of the city of Cius (Chius?), a place near the city of Pythia, possibly (see note 23 above), "the place of the ambassadors."

34 See note 9 above.

35 Arnakis identifies him with Balaban, "one of the most prominent of Osman's associates, usually mentioned as Balabanğik, who is connected with the blockade of Brusa." *Speculum* xxvi (1951), 112–13.

this date unless one doubts the historicity of the entire encounter.<sup>36</sup> It confirms that Palamas lived in the “place of the ambassadors” at least until July 1355, and that he wrote the letter to the Thessalonians sometime after this date, since he mentions his dialogue with the Chiones and refers to Taronites for its details. Furthermore we gather from this chronology that Palamas was not transferred to Nicaea before July 1355.<sup>37</sup>

As referred to earlier, it was on the initiative of Taronites the physician that the Archbishop was transferred from an environment of cold climate and constant psychological pressures to Nicaea, Taronites’ hometown. There Palamas settled in the Monastery of Saint Hyacinth, and was received warmly by the Christians “who were eagerly expecting us and wishing this [the transfer] to happen.” A letter of Palamas to David Disypatos,<sup>38</sup> adds at this point the information that Taronites, “a reservoir of God’s love, hurried to us ahead of the others, self-invited and self-called; for he was as desirous to see us as we were to see him.”<sup>39</sup> It seems that by the time Palamas reached Nicaea, proceedings for paying the ransom and securing the release of the captives had begun. Two priest-monks from Palamas’ company, Joseph and Gerasimos, had already reached Constantinople.<sup>40</sup> How long Palamas stayed in Nicaea is not clear from the letter. The main event he narrates is his attendance of a Muslim

36 Sakkellion informs us that at the end of the ms. edition of the *Dialexis* there is a note that on the date given for the *Dialexis* Patriarch Arsenios (?) was ordained deacon, and that the Patriarch of Bulgaria, Leo, ordained that day John as presbyter and, a week later, as Bishop of the diocese of Urbens. Cf. *Soter* xv (1892), 238.

37 Wittek’s suggestion in *Byzantion* XXI (1951), 122, n. 2, that the “Epistle and the *Dialexis* ... belong strictly together” and that “the date which figures at the end of the *Dialexis* ... seems therefore to be that of the epistle” is, indeed, unfounded. Cf. Charanis in *Byzantinoslavica* XVI (1955), 116. Sakkellion also was wrong in stating that the *Dialexis* was given in Nicaea, in 1355. *Soter* xv (1892), 239. Meyendorff’s calculation that Palamas spent a short time at the place of the ambassadors in June 1354 and was transferred during the next month to Nicaea – where he remained for almost a year – seems also questionable in the context of the Epistle and of the *Dialexis*. Cf. *A Study of Palamas*, p. 107.

38 Published by M. Treu in *Deltion of the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece* 111 (1889), 229–34, from a Greek Codex in Upsala. Treu maintains that the *Letter* was originally written to this monk and then expanded by the author into an encyclical to the Thessalonians; *ibid.*, 229. The similarity of the two letters is indeed striking, and there are several passages that are identical.

39 *Ibid.*, 230.

40 *Letter*, p. 14. We also know two other persons in Palamas’ company by name, namely his own *chartophylax* (archivist secretary) and a certain Constans Kalamaris, whom Palamas had freed in Prusa by paying the balance of his ransom. He had him now brought to Nicaea to be at his own service.

funeral and a subsequent dialogue he had with one of the officiating Muslim *tasimanes*.<sup>41</sup> After reporting on this dialogue Palamas writes that:

As to what went on the next days, the spirit is willing to write about, but the hand is not strong enough. I wrote that much for those who have a desire [to know].<sup>42</sup>

The letter ends with a rather long statement of admonition to the Thessalonians to accompany their faith with appropriate works of virtue. The main point of the letter is that although the Muslims confess Jesus as Christ and as Word and Spirit of God, they do not accept him as the Son of God and Saviour, and thus their works are works of damnation.<sup>43</sup>

When exactly and under what circumstances Palamas was set free is not entirely clear. Philotheos attributes the liberation of Palamas to three factors: to the change in the affairs of the Church and of the State;<sup>44</sup> to the fact that those in the administration who were interested in his liberation were now closer to power; and to the payment of ransom money by Serbian Christians who did so because they were “good and virtuous men, but also for the good of their own nation.”<sup>45</sup>

## 2 The Point and Counterpoint

Many historians have been intrigued by one of the greatest upheavals of all times: the conquest of Anatolia, the process of Islamization and the eventual fall of the Byzantine Empire. Palamas’ letter to the Thessalonians, complementing contemporary Byzantine (Nicephorus Gregoras and John Cantacuzenos) and Muslim sources (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and Ibn Khaldūn), is a significant document

41 According to Wittek, *Byzantion* XXI (1951), 423, n. 3, the word comes from *danishmand* used for an imam or religious leader. Cf. also Du Cange, *Glossarium*, II, col. 1535.

42 *Letter*, p. 19. The expression “what went on the next *days*” indicates a rather short stay of Palamas in Nicaea.

43 *Letter*, pp. 8, 10, 18, 19.

44 John V. Palaeologos was about to replace John Cantacuzenos. He succeeded in entering Constantinople in November 1354; Cantacuzenos had withdrawn to Mt. Athos where he became a monk under the name Joasaph.

45 Cf. Migne, *P.G.*, CLI, col. 627AB. According to Gregoras, contemporary and opponent of Palamas, it was Cantacuzenos who, although dethroned, paid the ransom for Palamas to his son-in-law Orkhan. *Roman History* XXIX, 42 (Bonn ed., III, 252). But Gregoras’ account regarding the hesychastic controversy and the principal theologian of the hesychasts, “does ... lose all objectivity and degenerate into a diffused and disquietingly tendentious account”; Ostrogorsky, *History*, p. 415.



in the study of this period. As Arnakis concludes, “The archbishop of Thessalonica was the first prominent Byzantine to witness the Turkish control of the straits almost a hundred years before the fall of Constantinople.”<sup>46</sup>

While Palamas’ epistle has been used as a historical source, relatively little attention has been paid to it as a document of Muslim-Christian dialogue in the fourteenth century. As stated earlier, it contains a rather detailed account of three of Palamas’ exchanges with Muslims: his dialogue with Ishmael at an early stage of his captivity, his debate with the “Chiones,” and his conversation with the Muslim imam in Nicaea.

Three principles seem to permeate Palamas’ treatment of Islam and of the Muslims. First, the conviction that both, the Turkish conquest of Anatolia and his own personal affliction, are part of God’s redemptive providential act. Second that, the encounter between Christianity and Islam represents a conflict and an antagonism between two religious cultures and ways of life, mutually exclusive of each other. And, third, the belief that Islam, as everything else, must be viewed in the light of the event of Christ, God’s God-man Word.

The first one of these, the question of divine providence, is very prominent in Palamas’ letter to the Thessalonians. Various positions on this matter are referred to: the view expressed by the Christian populace, attributing the conquests to God’s abandonment and to His wrath for their iniquities;<sup>47</sup> the Muslim position that the conquest and the defeat for the “unbelievers” represents a proof that God rewards the Muslims for their authentic faith;<sup>48</sup> and, finally Palamas’ own conviction that political upheavals which result from the use of human force are manifestations of the world living in evil. On the personal level, Palamas perceives his misfortune as an opportunity to expiate his own sins, and to bring the message about Christ to the Turks:

For it seems to me that it is through this dispensation that the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ, the God over all, becomes manifest even to those most barbaric among the barbarians, so that they may be without excuse in front of His most fearful tribunal, in the age to come, which is already at hand.<sup>49</sup>

46 *Byzantion* XXII (1952), 312.

47 Consider also the initial reaction of the Christians to the Arab conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries. Cf. D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the “heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), p. 23.

48 “Thus, this impious and God-hated and all-abominable race boast that they dominate the Romans on account of their own love for God...” *Letter*, p. 10.

49 *Letter*, p. 8. Philotheos echoes Palamas’ words when he describes him as “an evangelist and preacher, mediator and conciliator” for the Achaemenids (the Turks), “so that they may be led to the true freedom and kingdom.” Cf. Migne, *P.G.*, CLI, col. 626AB.

During his captivity Palamas experiences and becomes part of the antagonism between two rival theocratic states and two religious cultures, the Muslim and the Byzantine. He employs harsh adjectives when he refers to the Muslim Turks as adversaries of the Byzantine nation and particularly of the Byzantine religious tradition, calling them “this impious and God-hated and all-abominable race” – one of the strongest expressions found in the letter.<sup>50</sup>

Palamas’ knowledge of Islam is limited to a few basics which he seems to derive from popular Christian sources. In describing Islam and the religious behaviour of the Turks he begins from the Christian assertion that Christ is the God-man Word, as well as from the presupposition that although the Muslims know him, they do not honour and worship him as such. Here is a characteristic statement in which Palamas introduces Islam to the Thessalonians:

They, too, although they knew Christ – for they confess that he is word and spirit of God, and also that he was born from a virgin, and that he did and taught like God, that he ascended into heaven, that he remains immortal, and that he is going to come to judge the entire world – although, therefore, they knew Christ this way, they did not honour him as Christ, that is as God-man Word. Instead, they exchanged the truth for falsehood and they believed, honoured and followed a mere man, mortal and buried, namely Muḥammad, rather than the God-man, the ever-living and eternal Word. Who, although he tasted death in flesh, did so in order to abolish death and become ruler of the eternal and inviolate life, a life which the passion, death and resurrection of a mere man could never provide. Thus all those who rose from the dead lived the mortal and our kind of life, and died again. “Death,” however, once Christ rose from the dead, “no longer has dominion over him”; on the contrary, the future and everlasting life is made known beforehand [through him]. Since they, therefore, although they knew who Christ was, did not glorify nor worship him as Christ, “God gave them up to a base mind,” to passions and dishonourable deeds. As a result they live a reproachful inhuman life hated by God, like that of the son Esau, hated by God and cast out of his father’s blessing, to live a prodigal life in swords and knives, indulging in slavery, murder, plundering, rape, licentiousness, adultery, and homosexuality. And not only are they doing such things, but – what a madness! – they even believe that God gives His consent to these. This is my impression of them, now that I know their ways better.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Letter*, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Letter*, pp. 10–11.

The earliest dialogue of Palamas, namely that with Ishmael, the grandson of Emir Orkhan, is carried on at the most general level and reveals a lack of knowledge of each other's religion. Through it, Ishmael discovered that Christians practice fasting while Palamas learned about the Muslim prescription of almsgiving which led the latter to remark that in Christianity,

true charity is the product of one's authentic love for God, and that the more one loves God, the more, and truly, charitable he is.<sup>52</sup>

With this remark Palamas seems, in a way, to criticize Islam for legislating *zakāt*, and Orkhan for enforcing it as a rule every Friday.

The key point in this discussion – as it is, in a sense, in Muslim-Christian dialogue in general – is the prophethood of Muḥammad and the divinity of Jesus. Palamas denied the prophethood of Muḥammad on the basis that Christians do not accept his word and teaching, while Ishmael denied the divinity of Jesus because he finds it irreconcilable with the Christian belief in the crucifixion and rejects the notion of Mary as mother of the “son of God.” Palamas responded that the crucifixion does not contradict the divinity of Jesus, as the passion that occurred in his human nature does not affect the impassable divine nature. As to the second dilemma, Palamas denies that the veneration of Mary as Theotokos implies that God has a wife:

The Turks say that Christ is the word of God, and that he was born from a virgin, [named] Mary, whom we glorify as Theotokos. Therefore, if Mary, who gave birth to Christ insofar as the flesh is concerned, did not have a husband and did not need one – since he to whom she gave birth, physically, was the Word of God – much more is this so with God, Who, in giving birth to His own Word, incorporeally [being Himself incorporeal] and in a God-like manner, has no wife, and does not need any, as you wrongly presume.<sup>53</sup>

Palamas reports on the outcome of this dialogue that Ishmael, in spite of his previous violent disposition towards the Christians, was not angry towards him and not disturbed by his uncompromising answers. Ishmael's sarcasm at one point of the conversation indicates that he had already formed some definite opinions about Christianity.

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52 Ibid., p. 12.

53 Ibid., p. 13.

The next and most important debate of Palamas was with the Chiones. This is actually a Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue. Addressing himself to the Muslim representatives of Orkhan, Palamas suggested that it would profit the emir if he were to be present in these discussions as he would become more knowledgeable about the religion of his subjects. Palamas was interested in defending Christianity to Jews and Muslims at the same time, with a view toward winning the sympathies of the latter. Consistent with this goal, he made a rather elaborate exposition of the Christian doctrine of God and defended the Trinitarian doctrine using Old Testament quotations. To Taronites' surprise, who was recording the debate, the Muslim officials and the Chiones conceded to Palamas. What they were actually agreeing to was Palamas' assertion that "God has both, Word and Spirit, which are with Him and in Him, without beginning and without separation.... Therefore all three are one and the one is three";<sup>54</sup> not that Christ is this Word of God. "God only spoke, and Christ, too, was made," they maintained, in an obvious paraphrase of the Qur'ān.<sup>55</sup> Palamas then talks about the righteousness of God, the creation of man and his dignity, the failure of man, and God's initiative in taking the fallen nature upon Himself by the incarnation of His word:

Since man obeyed and submitted himself to the devil willingly and sinned by transgressing the divine will and was, justly, sentenced to death, it was not appropriate for God to redeem man from the devil by force; that way He would have been unjust to the devil, having pulled out from his hands by force man whom he [the devil] did not get by force. Also man's own free will would have been destroyed by the force and the power of God as He would be freeing man; and it is not like God to destroy His own work.... For this reason the only sinless word of God becomes a son of man ... [and] he takes upon himself the passions of us who were responsible ...<sup>56</sup>

As to the creation of Christ, Palamas gives the following answer:

How is it, then, that the Word is made again by another word? In such a case it will mean that the word of God is not co-eternal with God Himself. But I showed you this at the beginning and you, too, confessed that God has a Word and a Spirit co-eternal with Him ... If Christ is the Word and Spirit of God because he was made by the Word of God, then the stone,

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54 *Soter* xv (1892), 241–42.

55 Cf. S. 3:59 "Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allāh is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is."

56 *Soter* xv (1892), 241–42.

the herb and every one of the reptiles is also word and spirit of God because in their case also He spoke and they were made.<sup>57</sup>

The conversation then turns to the issue of Muḥammad as prophet, and moves to circumcision and veneration of icons. The Chiones questioned Palamas as to why the Christians do not practice circumcision. Palamas answered with a pointed reversal of the question to the effect that they do so for the same reason that the Chiones and the Muslims have abolished a number of religious practices which go back to the early times, even to the time of Moses. Taronites remarks that neither the Chiones nor the Turks had any response to this.<sup>58</sup>

The opponents then raise the question how Christians can justify their practice of making and worshipping representations and icons since this is clearly prohibited by the Mosaic Law. Palamas responds in the classical fashion by making a distinction between “worship” (*latreia*) and “veneration” (*proskynēsis*), stressing that worship indeed belongs to God alone. In reversing the argument he reminds his opponents that Moses “left almost nothing of which he did not make a representation” – referring to the tabernacle and the Cherubim. Taronites writes: “Then the Turks said again: ‘Did, indeed, Moses make these things then?’ Answered many of them, ‘Yes, he did all these.’”<sup>59</sup> With this unanimous response the meeting was called to an end, as Taronites reports:

At this point the officials of the Turks stood up, greeted with respect the bishop of Thessalonica and they started leaving. One of the Chiones, however, stayed behind, insulted the great bishop of God, attacked him and beat him in the eye. The rest of the Turks who saw him, got hold of him, rebuked him severely and brought him in front of the emir to whom they said whatever they said. What the Turks said to the emir we did not hear exactly. As to what we have written down we have been ear-witnesses. We wrote down what we saw and heard as if God Himself was seeing.<sup>60</sup>

The third dialogue took place in Nicaea between Palamas and a Muslim imam. By that time Palamas’ fame and his self-confidence in dealing with Muslims had increased considerably.<sup>61</sup> The central theme of this debate is a comparison between Jesus and Muḥammad. For Palamas, Jesus is the Christ, indivisible

57 Ibid., 244.

58 Ibid., 245.

59 Ibid., 246.

60 Ibid.

61 “... it would have been something very pleasant, indeed, to the ears of Christians, if one had the time to record ... simply all the conversations we had....” *Letter*, p. 14.

from the Father, who will return to judge all men. For the imam, Christ is only a “servant of God”<sup>62</sup> and a prophet whom the Muslims accept as one of the prophets of written revelation contained in the Gospel, one of the “four books.”<sup>63</sup> Why then is it that the Christians do not accept Muḥammad or “the Book that came down from heaven?” For Palamas the reliability of Jesus, attested to by previous witnesses and the extraordinary deeds and signs he performed,<sup>64</sup> is also confirmed by the fact that he is

the only one ever born of a virgin, and the only one who ever ascended into heaven and remains there immortal, and the only one who is ever hoped to come back thence to judge the living and the dead who will be raised. I say about him only what you, the Turks, also confess.<sup>65</sup>

For the imam the reliability of Muḥammad is attested to by the testimony of Jesus himself, recorded in the Gospel<sup>66</sup> and later deleted by the Christians. The Muslim teaching of the *tahrīf*, or “corruption” of the Scriptures by the Christians in order to conceal the prophesies foretelling the advent of Muḥammad, is raised here. Palamas, apparently unprepared for this argument which he had not encountered earlier, makes the startling remark that “If there were anything good written in the Gospel about Muḥammad, this would have been also in the books of the Prophets.”<sup>67</sup> Another tangible proof of this authenticity of Muḥammad according to the imam was his military success. Palamas disassociates such success from claims of divine mission and cites the case of Alexander the Great who, in spite of his military success, was never proclaimed as prophet or saviour of souls by his contemporaries. The last statement of Palamas is a violent attack on Muḥammad, “who even though he resorted to violence and suggested licentious things, did not take into his fold even one whole portion of the world.”<sup>68</sup> The hostility that this kind of remark aroused is understandable, and, noticing it, Palamas quickly changed his tone. But it was

62 Cf. S. 4:172; 19:30, (93); 43:59.

63 Obviously the Tawrat of Moses, the Zabūr of David, the Injil of Jesus, and the Qur’ān.

64 In my “The Formation of Later Islamic Doctrines as a Response to Byzantine Polemics: The Miracles of Muḥammad,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XXVII (1982), 307–24 (see Chapter 4 in this volume), I have indicated that there is ample evidence that the embellishment of the life of Muḥammad with miracles was the result of, among others, a direct challenge of the Muslims by early Byzantine polemicists.

65 *Letter*, p. 17.

66 The reference here is to S. 7:157 and 61:6, as well as to the Gospel according to John 15:23–26 and 16:7–15, in regards to the Paraclete, Counsellor, or Comforter. Aḥmad of S. 61:6 is equated with the Paraclete.

67 *Letter*, p. 18.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

especially due to an, in this situation, conciliatory remark of a Muslim that the conversation ended on a note of hope. Palamas reports on this last phase of the dialogue:

At these [words] the Christians who happened to be there, seeing that the Turks were already getting irritated, signalled to me to finish my speech. Turning to a milder tone and smiling gently at them, I said again, “Had we, after all, been in agreement in our dialogue, we would be of one and the same faith, too.”... Then one of them said, “There will come a time when we will agree with each other.” I consented and I wished even further that such a time may come quicker.<sup>69</sup>

Palamas’ *Letter to the Thessalonians* is primarily of a pastoral nature, utilizing the experiences of his captivity to admonish his flock about active faith. He makes a rather clear distinction between Islamic faith and the actual life of the Turkish Muslims. At times he is indignant with the latter and uses the Muslims as a negative illustration of his admonition. As a spiritual leader of a major Christian community and a hesychast theologian, Palamas is concerned with that faith which manifests the redeeming, sanctifying grace. Thus he writes to the Thessalonians:

Watch not to suffer anything like these ill-minded men; I do not mean in regard to their reverence of God [i.e., their faith in God], but rather in regard to their behaviour.... Take heed, therefore, not to be like them and find yourself on the one hand confessing that the virtues and the Biblical injunctions are righteous, and on the other hand with your deeds breaking away from them....<sup>70</sup>

In summary, three concluding observations seem to be in order.

1. Gregory Palamas is rightly considered as “the greatest Greek theologian of the Middle Ages.”<sup>71</sup> His place in the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature is important, mainly because of his encounter with Muslims and the valuable historical and personal information he provides. As a mystic, Palamas was in a position to transcend the temporal circumstances and to address himself to the human spiritual condition. While contemporary pro-Latin authors urged the Byzantines to unite with the West in order to resist the onslaught of the Turks, Palamas insisted on the purity

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., pp. 20–21.

71 Meyendorff, *A Study of Palamas*, p. 115.

of Orthodoxy, irrespective of the unavoidable political consequences. In the words of Meyendorff, “Palamas was much better prepared than many of his contemporaries to accept the final ruin of the Empire at the hands of the Turks.”<sup>72</sup> He had lived with them even in captivity for over one year and he had entered into frequent, perhaps daily, dialogue with them, earning both their anger and their respect.

2. The documents here surveyed are significant not because of the information on Islam which they provide, but rather as sources for a fuller understanding of Christian-Muslim exchange taking place in Anatolia in the middle of the fourteenth century. Palamas himself certainly did progress in his awareness and understanding of Muslims and their faith. Circumstances led him into different types of involvement. At first he is, as a teacher of Christianity, invited for a dialogue with Ishmael. This is a formal and general discussion, aiming at the articulation of a minimal common ground for coexistence. In the second phase he is drawn into a debate with the Chiones and the Turks. This is a theological scrutiny of certain issues dividing the two parties and Palamas’ role here is that of an apologist. In the third phase Palamas takes the initiative and precipitates a debate which is more of a direct confrontation, and in which he seems to be speaking as an authority.
3. The topics discussed are the traditional ones found in Muslim-Christian conversations since the time of John of Damascus. Obviously the Christian uses the Christian scriptures as his point of departure, and the Muslim the Qur’ān, at times leading to an impasse. And there is no real bridge-building even when either one of the parties is using the Scripture of the other, for in those cases the other’s Scripture is interpreted from within the framework of one’s own tradition and for one’s own apologetic purposes. So Palamas is using Qur’anic affirmations about Jesus as Christ, Word and Spirit of God, born of a virgin and ascended into heaven, while the Muslim refers to the Christian Scripture as a source of foretelling the coming of Muḥammad as prophet. In short, Scriptural arguments derived from each other’s Scripture are no more convincing – in either case – to the partner in this dialogue than those deduced from one’s own Scripture.

Rather than ending with a critical remark about this fourteenth-century instance of an in many respects unimaginative use of arguments and counter-arguments, it may seem appropriate to admit that even in our time we have made in many circles little, if any, progress towards a more open-ended and truly common search for the truth.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 91.



## Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296–1360) and the Muslims

In the beginning of 1354 Gregory Palamas (1296–1360), Archbishop of Thessalonike and the principal spokesman for the hesychasts,<sup>1</sup> the mystical movement flourishing then especially in the monastic republic of Mount Athos, was sailing from Thessalonike to the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The purpose of this trip was to bring about reconciliation between the young self-exiled heir to the throne John V Palaiologos (1341–1391) and the Grand Domestic John Kantakouzenos, who, upon the death of Andronikos III Palaiologos in 1341 had proclaimed himself emperor – an event that sparked even another civil war in the fourteenth century Byzantium. The trip was undertaken at the request of John Palaiologos<sup>2</sup> and his mother, Empress Ann of Savoy, who although fully aware of Palamas' sympathy towards Kantakouzenos, was nevertheless respectful of his integrity, theological soundness, and statesmanship.

The first stop of the journey on a royal boat was at the island of Tenedos in the Aegean at the mouth of the straits of the Dardanelles, a stop-over for Palamas to receive further instructions on his assignment. Up to this point the trip progressed with no interruptions. Leaving Tenedos, however, on another boat the travelers met with a fierce storm which forced the captain to seek refuge at a place near the city of Kallipolis (Gallipoli) on the European side of the straits. Kallipolis had just suffered a severe earthquake which had left it almost in ruins and without defense. In such a condition the city was captured by the Osmanli Turks, from the Asiatic side of the straits.<sup>3</sup> The boat, unable

1 Of the extensive bibliography on Palamas one could still mention the work of Gregory Papamichael, *Ho Hagios Gregorios Palamas, Archiepiskopos Thessalonikes* (St. Petersburg and Alexandria, 1911), but especially the works of John Meyendorff, an authority on Palamas and the Palamite theology, particularly his *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959) (English editions *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, London, 1964) and *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (N. York, 1974). The main source of Palamas' life is Philotheos, Patriarch of Constantinople (1354, 1364–76), *Encomion, or Laudation*, PG 151:551–656.

2 Cf. Philotheos, 626A.

3 The date of the fall of Kallipolis has been the subject of controversy among Byzantine scholars. A fourteenth century chronicle [published by Joseph Müller, *Byzantinische Analekten*, Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in *Philologisch-Historische Klasse* 9 (1852) 336–419] specifies the date of the earthquake as having taken place on 2 March 1354 and it connects this event to the subsequent fall of the city to the Turks. This date, accepted originally by G. Georgiades Arnakis in *Oi Prwtoi Othwmanoí* No. 41 of the

to leave Kallipolis, was taken over by the Turks who demanded ransom money for the release of its passengers. With communication with the imperial court impaired, the ransom price continuously raised as the prominence of Palamas was becoming known, and with the ransom money coming from nowhere, a long captivity began, which was to lead Palamas and his companions through a number of cities of northwestern Asia Minor, or Anatolia. Palamas' captivity lasted for over a year, from March 1354 to July 1355.

The events which led to his captivity, his journey through the newly conquered Christian cities, his contacts with the Christian population, his impression of his Turkish captors and his debates with Muslims on matters of religion, Palamas himself describes in a rather lengthy letter, of pastoral character, to the Christians of his archdiocese. The credit of drawing attention and making the first analysis of its historical content belongs to G. Georgiades Arnakis.<sup>4</sup> The letter, although in manuscript and printed form, had by-passed the attention even of such a careful student of Palamas as Gregory Papamichael. The earliest evidence of such a letter is Philotheos himself, although the text seems to have been deleted from Migne's edition of the *Encomion*.<sup>5</sup>

The text of Palamas' letter to the Thessalonians is found in three manuscripts:

1. The Athonite MS of St. Panteleimon Monastery, No. 215. This was copied by A. Adamantios on 3 August 1895 at the instruction of Spyros Lambros, who verified the accuracy of the manuscript. This transcript was prefaced and published by K. Dyovouniotes in the Greek journal *Neos Hellenomnemon* (Athens) 16 (1922) 7–21. It is this text which we are offering here in translation.
2. Codex No. 1379 of the National Library of Athens. The letter is found between the leaves 408b–415b, according to the information of A.I. Sakkelion.<sup>6</sup>
3. Codex No. 2409 of the National Library of Paris, which is mentioned by M. Treu.<sup>7</sup>

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*Beihefte* of the *Byzantinische-griechische Jahrbücher* (Athens, 1947), has been revised to 1355 by the same [see his "Gregory Palamas among the Turks and Documents of His Captivity as Historical Sources," *Speculum* 26 (1951), 111–12; and his "Gregory Palamas, the Χιόνης, and the fall of Gallipoli," *Byzantion* 22 (1952), 310ff], on the basis of some details of the present letter of Palamas which, I think, Arnakis has misunderstood. P. Charanis has convincingly shown that the date 1354 is the right one on the basis of the existing textual evidences. "On the date of the Occupation of Gallipoli by the Turks," *Byzantinoslavica* 16 (1955), 113–17. A closer reading of Palamas' texts points to 1354 as the year of the earthquake and of the fall of Kallipolis.

4 *Speculum* 26 (1951) 104–18.

5 PG, 151:626 B–C.

6 Cf. the Greek journal *Soter* 15 (Athens, 1892), 238.

7 Cf. the Greek journal, *Deltion tes Historikes kai Ethnologikes Hetairias tes Hellados* (Athens) 3 (1889), 227, on the information of the Notes from Fabricius' Library. Cf. PG, 150:777–8 (#VI).

A fourth manuscript edition seems to be that of the Parisian Codex Coislin Nos. 97 and 98.<sup>8</sup> To our knowledge there has been no critical edition of the text and this is the first translation of the letter in its entirety. There has been no serious challenge also as to the authenticity of the letter, either prior to Arnakis' studies or subsequent debates. An exception has been M. Jugie who has left the question of authenticity open.<sup>9</sup>

The exact date of the letter is not established. The titles in the two first MSS suggest that Palamas *sent* the letter to his church from Asia while he was captive there. However the title of the letter in the Parisian MS indicates that Palamas *wrote* the letter while captive in Asia. It seems most likely that Palamas wrote the letter during the last part of his captivity in Nicaea in July 1355, as he himself states,<sup>10</sup> or even in Constantinople after his release in the same year. This is attested to also by the fact that the letter refers to his debate with the Chiones, which took place just prior to his transfer to Nicaea. This debate was recorded and chronicled by the physician Taronites as having taken place "in the month of July, on the eighth indiction of the year 1363"<sup>11</sup> (i.e. 1355). Secondly the wording of the letter seems to suggest that the letter was written after the captivity had ended.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly it seems logical to assume that such a long letter, containing very negative and at times very derogatory expressions against the Turks and their religion, would not have been allowed to leave Anatolia, or would not have safely reached Thessalonike. Thus it seems that, although Palamas wrote the letter during the last days of a relatively easy phase of captivity in Nicaea – a phase which he describes in some details – he sent it to Thessalonike after he was released and after he had arrived in Constantinople; an event which took place in the summer of the same year 1355.

Prior to his transfer to Nicaea, Palamas was engaged in an interfaith dialogue with Emir Orkhan's own "wise and reputable men" on matters of religion, who are identified as "Chiones." Who are these Chiones is not clear from Palamas'

8 PG, 150:808 (#LXVI).

9 " ... A plusieurs reprises, il y a l'occasion d'exposer aux musulmans les mystères de la Trinité et de l'Incarnation, comme il l'a raconté lui-même dans une lettre adressée à son Église, *si toutefois la pièce est authentique*." "Palamas, Grégoire," in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 11 (1932), p. 1740. The emphasis is ours.

10 "You should know also that I came to live in Nicaea, during which time having some freedom I described briefly to your love the things regarding my captivity ..." The wording of this statement suggests that Palamas wrote part of the letter in Nicaea but completed it elsewhere.

11 *Soter*, 15 (1892) 246: Cf. below.

12 Cf. e.g. "I will narrate, therefore, to your love what I have perceived to be of the providence of God when I was led to Asia through captivity ..." Palamas sees as part of God's judgment not only the predicament of the Christian population in Anatolia, but also his own survival and experience through his captivity, which by then had perhaps ended.

letter. G.G. Arnakis and Paul Wittek have debated the question in a series of articles.<sup>13</sup> From the context of the debate, recorded by Taronites who was an eye and ear witness, we gather that the Chiones were former Jews converted to Islam, perhaps Greek-speaking, eager to please Orkhan and very anxious to conceal their possible ignorance or incompetence on matters of the Islamic faith! The text of this debate, or *Dialexis*, has been published by A.I. Sakkelion from a seventeenth century MS of the National Library of Athens (no. 1379, fol.415b–18a, following the text of Palamas' letter to the Thessalonians).<sup>14</sup>

The text of the letter and that of the *Dialexis* form together a unit which is our main source of Palamas' experience of the Turkish captivity. Chronologically both texts belong to the same year (1355) and possibly to the same month, the letter being written after the *Dialexis*. Although the latter did not come out of the hand of the archbishop, it contains definitely his thoughts and his actions. For the sequence of the events, the progression of Palamas' experience of the Turks and his acquaintance with Islam, we have inserted the *Dialexis* at the point of its historical occurrence as it is indicated in the letter.<sup>15</sup> Here are the texts:

By the same<sup>16</sup>

### Letter Which He Sent to His Church From Asia While Captive

The humble Metropolitan of Thessalonike, to all those who are to me, the humble one, beloved children and brethren in the Holy Spirit; as well as to their Graces the Bishops and the ecclesiastical officials and through them to everyone, and particularly to those of you who want to know about us, may mercy eternal from God, grace and peace be abundant upon you.

13 Paul Wittek ("Χιόνες" *Byzantion* 21 (1951), 421–23) has challenged Arnakis' identification of the Chiones with the militant religious group of *Akhiyan*, which Arnakis promulgated in his article on Palamas in *Speculum*, 26 (1951) 114. Arnakis responded to the challenge ("Gregory Palamas, the Χιόνες, and the fall of Gallipoli," *Byzantion* 22 (1952), 305–12) by analyzing etymologically the name and reaffirming his belief that the name signifies the *Akhis*. Wittek's suggestion is that the name Chiones is a distortion and evolution of the Persian and Turkish *khoja* which means master, teacher, clergyman; the Chiones therefore are, according to him, religious master or teachers.

14 *Soter* 15 (1892), 240–46. For the texts of the "Epistle to his own Church" and the "Dialexis to Chiones", see also P.K. Christou ed., *Γρηγορίου του Παλαμά Συγγράμματα*, Vol. IV, (Thessalonike, 1988), pp. 120–141 and 148–165 respectively.

15 Cf. Meyendorff, *A Study of Palamas*, p. 115.

16 I.e., Gregory Palamas.

God's judgement – I mean His providence for us – is abysmal, as we have been taught also by David, the revealer of God, that the height or depth of His wisdom is inscrutable.<sup>17</sup> However, there are those who out of, let us say, weak mind as if becoming dizzy in such things, and spinning around and falling down badly, either reject the notion of providence disrespectfully or they reprove uncritically the life of those who suffer or they wickedly mistaken virtue and even faith itself as empty and silly. He, however, who is of sound mind, the more he observes that abyss and height and reaches the point of contemplation, the more he talks about it and marvels at, along with the invisible, the visible. I will narrate therefore to your love what I have perceived to be of the providence of God, when I was led to Asia through captivity, seeing the Christians and the Turks mixing with each other, going about their lives, leading and being led by each other. For it seems to me that it is through this dispensation that the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ, the God over all, became manifest even to those most barbaric among the barbarians, so that they may be without excuse in front of His most fearful tribunal in the age to come, which is already at hand. It is because of such a dispensation, as one can gather from the events, that we also were delivered unto their hands, as a small expiation for our many sins committed against God – a kind of fire, extinguishable though, to which those who are now tried are delivered; while those who inflict insults, if they happen not to repent for their unbelief and their brutality, are to be kept in a fire which is never to be extinguished. And even if I had lost almost completely interest in the diligence of writing – something which I have over-looked for such a long time – I could never have found a more worthwhile subject, befitting to me the most and not least demanding description, than what happened to me lately. In this respect it should be my task to go through our acts, and the acts of those in power towards us.

Thus, up to Tenedos I travelled on the imperial trireme.<sup>18</sup> From there on, while traveling through Bithynia and Mesothynia, I missed nothing of what was happening in Constantinople, either on the land or in the sea, including those things from above (I do not know whether I should call them chastisements or abandonments) which our nation suffered, and especially the earthquake which left not only buildings and properties, but also bodies and lives, in the words of the poet,<sup>19</sup> “prey to dogs” and to all kinds of vultures, human and

17 Cf. [Ps. 76(77).20]; Rom. 11.33–34.

18 Τριήρης, a galley with three men on each bench, each man rowing one oar, and three oars passing together through the outrigger.

19 *Iliad*, 1:4.

non-human. But let me not bypass everything and cause disappointment, but describe for those of you who wish to know, a few of my experiences.

A few days after that earthquake we embarked on an eight-hundred-*medimnoi*<sup>20</sup> ship from Tenedos; would that had never happened. As we encountered a strong wind and as the captain was deeply in debt, or rather stupefied and from then on against saving the ship, we sailed at once up to a point off Kallipolis.<sup>21</sup> Then the wind turned and it was not hitting the prow. However, we did not give way, but set ourselves against it, rather than being carried away by the attacking force, and all this during night and wintry time. As we were in imminent danger as soon as we managed finally to come to one accord with each other, and with the courage and the undertakings of the good captain, we hit the stem. Giving in to the force of the wind – a forceful north wind – we let ourselves be carried back to Kallipolis. However, since that earthquake had placed that city, too, under the Achaimenids,<sup>22</sup> whom we now call Turks, and it was impossible for us to moor at its port, we brought the ship to a halt somewhere at a nearby shore, by casting all its anchors. At daybreak, the north wind not being any milder, we saw the Turks on the ground and in the sea going back and forth in contingents and a number of them rowing speedily as if they were binding together the two opposite continents and rushing from the eastern continent to pillage the Romans living on the opposite side. Being therefore aware of all these things, we all begged the captain to bring us back to Tenedos so that we might not, by delaying, fall badly into the hands of the Turks. As he was not convinced, we all offered him gifts and promised him big remunerations; we, the unfortunate ones, who under these circumstances were in need of a captain, and who allowed ourselves, mistakenly, to such a plunder. We even showed him how imminent and inevitable the danger was should, indeed, the strong wind force us to stay there anchored, tossing us to and fro! He however remained unconvinced, puffing at the expected enemy. Finally the wind subsided, but the barbarians attacked the boat, fully armed and with big rather than any small boats. Having given a fight (on what do I

20 Pl. of *medimnos* the ship tonnage measure in corn, equal to 52–59 liters.

21 Gallipoli, or Kallipolis (= city of beauty). Demetrios Kydones in an “Advisory speech on Kallipolis, demanded by Murat” (PG 154:1009–36) reminds the Byzantine authorities that “we always considered it to be most precious of all our possessions” (1012B) and that although itself small, it protects the greatest metropolis, that is Constantinople (1024D). Kydones had advised against surrendering the city to the Turks.

22 This is the name of the ancient Persian dynasty to which Alexander the Great put an end in 330 BC. In the third century AD Artaxerxes revitalized the Zoroastrian religion and claimed back the territories of the ancient Persian Empire. The ferocity and the extent of their advances led the Byzantines to equate the Turks to the Persians in these respects.

need to expatiate?), we were badly defeated and taken captives; and we were not a small number.

First, we all were led together to Lampsakos.<sup>23</sup> Immediately, and from then on, I shared every consequence of the captivity with my fellow captives, such as exposure, lack of necessities, intestinal disorders, emaciation of the body as a result of them, and almost paralysis of the members. There was, on the other hand, quite a protest raised among the local Romans<sup>24</sup> against the barbarians, supposedly in my favor, praising highly my education and virtues and bringing forth my struggles, as they said, for the Church. Although not falsely, such things were said in exaggeration as only myself I am in a position to know better and in no way were these profitable to me. Because the hope got into the mind of the ruler of the barbarians that he may gain money from me in thousands. Thus he instigated those who adhere to the barbaric faith<sup>25</sup> to become enraged against me and even some of them to molest me and pick an argument and, if they prove weak in all other respects, to use our captivity as a proof of the ineffectiveness of our faith.

Thus they – this impious and God-hated and fully abominable race – boast that they dominate over the Romans on account of their own faith in God. They ignore that this world rests in evil and that evil men and servants of this low world are those who dominate the greatest part of it, who dislodge their neighbors by force and with weapons. That is why the idolaters dominated almost the entire universe for the entire time up to Constantine, the truly God-loving king. And again since then – a long time in between – they [the Turks] are little, if any, different from those previous ones [i.e. the idolaters]. It seems to me therefore that these, too, who boast of their evil deeds they will suffer the same as the pagans. They, says the apostle, “will be given up to a base mind ... for although they knew God they did not honor him or respect him as God.”<sup>26</sup> They, too, although they knew Christ – for they confess that he is word and spirit of God, and also that he was born from a virgin and that he acted and taught like God, that he ascended into heaven, that he remains immortal and that he is going to come to judge the entire world – although, therefore, they knew Christ this way, they did not honor him as Christ, that is as God-man Word. Instead, they exchanged the truth for falsehood and they believed, honored and followed a mere man, mortal and buried, Muhammad that is, rather than the Godman, the ever-living and

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23 City on the Asiatic side of the straights across from Kallipolis.

24 meaning Christian populations.

25 I.e., the Muslim Turks.

26 Cf. Rom. 1.28, 21.

eternal Word. Who, although he tasted death in flesh, yet he did so in order to abolish death and become ruler of the eternal and inviolate life, a life which the passion, death and resurrection of a mere man could never provide. Thus all those who rose from the dead lived the mortal and our kind of life, and died again. "Death," however, once Christ rose from the dead, "no longer has dominion over him";<sup>27</sup> on the contrary, the future and everlasting life is made known beforehand [through him].

Since, therefore, knowing who Christ was they did not glorify nor did they worship him as Christ, "God gave them up to a base mind,"<sup>28</sup> to passions and dishonorable deeds. As a result they live a reproachful, inhumane, and God-hated life – like that of the son Esau, hated by God and cast out of his father's blessing – to live a prodigal life in swords and knives, indulging in slavery, murder, plundering, rape, licentiousness, adultery, and homosexuality. Not only are they doing such things, but – what a madness! – they even believe that God gives them His consent. This is my impression of them, now that I know their ways better.

You should remember also that we were frequently surrounded by a crowd of men and women; some of them wanting to tell us about their own lives and be cured of their spiritual afflictions; others to find answers to questions on matters of faith, most of them wondering why God had abandoned our nation so much; and some others to cry out their sympathy for my misfortune. Thus, having stayed there for seven days – being on the seventh day afflicted by the barbarians in order to raise our ransom – on the eighth day we took up the road leading to Pegai. Even if I wanted to tell you the sufferings of this journey in detail, neither the ink nor the paper that I have now available would be enough. At any rate, in three days they led us to Pegai. First they let us, utterly exhausted from the walk and from what they did to us during the journey, spend two days in the open, even though it was icy cold. Then they took me and the monks separately and threatened us with threats that are unbearable even to hear, forcing us to raise the amount of our ransom. As they did not succeed – for my entire property, as one can find many who know this, consists only of what I need every day – as, therefore, they did not succeed in securing what they demanded, they did not carry out their threats. Instead, they led us to a church of Christ, which still survives by His power praising Him out loud, which we felt as a peaceful harbor after those many storms of all sorts. For there were monks and lay people living about the church – pleasant harbors on the opposite side for those who were ending up there from captivity – from

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27 Rom. 6.9.

28 Rom. 1.28.



whom we, too, received not a small comfort.<sup>29</sup> I, therefore, with all the others who were with me, was offered hospitality by Mavrozoumis, who was different from all the rest in kindness. He was an *heteriarch*.<sup>30</sup> He gave us shelter, and since we were naked he clothed us, and hungry he gave us food, being thirsty he gave us drink. He actually nourished us for almost three months. Moreover, he delivered us from the company of the barbarians, he comforted us and made it possible for us to teach in Church according to our practice, and to provide spiritual relief to the indigenous Christians and to those who as captives were gathered there.

After three months had passed, as I just mentioned, we were taken up from there by lawless hands and led to Prusa<sup>31</sup> in four days. Here those Christians who differed in prudence, while associating with us were touching upon more serious matters; and that under unfavorable circumstances, for the barbarians were all around us. And, those who exerted themselves in piety disregarded such unfavorable time, for they thought that they unexpectedly had in front of them the man who could tell them about the things they wanted to know. After two days had passed, accompanied by those who had led us to Prusa, we arrived, again in two days, at a hilly village surrounded at a distance by mountains and beautified by thick shade trees. Winds blowing continuously, now from the one now from the other side of the mountain ridges, give it a very cool draught, and the air all around is cold even during the summer, and that had made the supreme ruler of the barbarians spend the summer in that place.

When the other captives and I arrived there, a grandson of the great Emir was sent to us. He invited me apart from the rest of the captives and he sat down with me on the soft grass with a few leaders surrounding him. After we sat down they brought to me fruits and to him meat. At his signal we began eating, myself the fruits and he the meat. As we were eating he asked me if I ever eat any meat and for what reason.<sup>32</sup> As soon as I gave the proper answer to the

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29 Pegai was a coastal city east of Lampsakos. The city, although pillaged by the Turks, had become a refuge for uprooted Christian populations in Anatolia. A contemporary act of the Patriarchate of Constantinople offers the bishop of Pegai the metropolitan office of Sozopolis as a way of *epidosis* (extra support) as "its most pious bishop is in need of even the very necessities of livelihood." Fr. Miklosich and Jos. Müller, *Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani* 1 (Vindobonae, 1860), p. 330.

30 "Great Heteriarch" was a title in the Constantinopolitan imperial court of a dignitary charged with the duty of receiving those who were fleeing to the imperial court and especially the foreigners and the friends (*hetairoi*) of the court. Cf. Du Gange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae Graecitatis*, 1, col. 439.

31 Brusa. The city, sieged and pillaged by Osman in 1301, fell into the hands of Orkhan on 6 April 1326.

32 Monks of Mt. Athos and in many other strict monastic communities do not have meat in their meals. Furthermore this encounter took place on a Friday which is a fasting day.

question, somebody came in from outside apologizing for his tardiness. “Only now” he said “was I able to finish the distribution of alms which the great Emir has ordered to take place every Friday.” Thence we began a long discussion on almsgiving. “Do you also practice almsgiving?” asked Ishmael; that was the name of the grandson of the great Emir. I said to him that the true almsgiving is the one which derives from the love towards the true God, and that the more one loves God, the more and truly benevolent he is. Then he asked me again whether we also accept and love their prophet Muhammad. When I answered in the negative, he asked for the reason. I offered a sufficient defense on this matter also, as it was appropriate to the interlocutor who did not believe in the teaching of the Teacher,<sup>33</sup> and who said that one should not love the Teacher as teacher. “But,” he said, “on the one hand you love Isa<sup>34</sup> (this is how he called the Christ), and on the other hand you believe that he was crucified!” I agreed with this assertion and bringing forth the matter of the voluntary character, the way and the glory of the passion, and the matter of the impassibility of the divine nature, I explained with a few words what he thought to be a contradiction. As I did this he asked me again, “Why do you venerate the wood and the cross?” To this also I gave him the response which God had provided me, adding “Would you not accept those who would honor your insignia, and punish severely those who would dishonor them? Christ’s banner of victory and His sign are the cross.” He, however, wanted to ridicule further and defame our beliefs as inappropriate, and said, “At any rate, you believe that God has had a wife, for you proclaim that He gave birth to a son.” Then I said to him again, “The Turks say that Christ is the word of God,<sup>35</sup> and that he was born from the Virgin Mary,<sup>36</sup> whom we glorify as Theotokos. Therefore, if Mary, who gave birth to Christ insofar as the flesh is concerned, did not have a husband, nor did she need one –since she gave birth, physically, to the Word of God – much more it is so with God, Who, in giving birth to His own word, incorporeally (being Himself incorporeal) and in a God-like manner, has had no wife, nor did He need any, as you wrongly presume.” Well, he did not dispose himself angrily against this either, although, those who know him say that originally he was unrelenting and enraging against the Christians. To those last words a heavy rainstorm began; so he got up and left running, while I returned to where the captives were, suffering the rain with them in the open air. When the rain stopped and the day was coming to a close, late in the evening our captors brought us all before the presence of the ruler.

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33    Implying here Christ.

34    Palamas’ text has it as “Esa.”

35    Cf. Surah 3:39, 45; 4:171; 2:87.

36    Cf. Surah 2:87, 253; 3:45; 4:157; 5:46, 75, 110, 112, 114, 116; 19:34; 33:7; 57:27; 61:6, 14.

At his command we were then led to the neighboring town which had been inhabited by Roman Christians for a long time, where there was also a residence for the royal ambassadors. Thus, we were in contact with them<sup>37</sup> day after day, receiving from them provisions and some consolation; and neither did the roughness and the severe cold weather of the place, nor the constant need of necessary goods for those in my company who were sick, succeed in succumbing the good will of those people. When once the Emir suffered from a liver trouble, there arrived, called for that purpose, the good man Taronites, a most God-loving and pious doctor who did everything for me and who, when he saw that it would be profitable for me spiritually and physically to be transferred to Nicaea, he made every effort to convince the Emir [to let me go]. He asked him about me saying, "Who and what kind of a man is this monk?" And when he answered whatever he answered, the Emir said, I, too, have wise and reputable men to engage in a dialogue with him." He, then, sent immediately to call the Chiones; men who, taught by the Satan, had studied nothing else but blasphemies and shameful things towards our Lord Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. Taronites, who was an eye and ear-witness when these were there, was keeping written notes of everything that was spoken and done; which he has circulated and anyone who wants may go through and know about them.

By the Same GREGORY OF THESSALONIKE

To the Atheist Chiones

An Exchange Written by, and Taken Place in the Presence of,  
Taronites the Doctor, an Ear-witness

There came the Chiones, "By the command of the Emir," they said, "to converse with the metropolitan of Thessalonike." They were afraid, however, to start a controversy in front of him and first of all they tried to convince me, the bishop and especially the associates of the Emir, that no confrontation may take place on such matters. Being unable to attain this, they tried again to convince us that at least such a debate should not take place in front of the Emir; which they attained. And he [the Emir] appointed a number of officials including a certain so-called Palapanes.<sup>38</sup> These men came along with the Chiones to the place where the metropolitan was. Thus we sat all together and the Chiones began a long talk. The main point of their talk was that "We were taught ten commandments which Moses brought down, written on slates of stone. We

37 I.e., the Roman Christians.

38 Arnakis identifies him with Balaban, "one of the most prominent of Osman's associates, usually mentioned as Balabangik, who is connected with the blockade of Brusa." Cf. *Speculum* (1951), 112-13.

also knew that the Turks hold the same ones. We left, therefore, the faith which we had before, came to them and became Turks too.”

The officials then asked the Metropolitan to respond, and he began with these words: “I should not respond now, because who am I, compared to the height and greatness of the catholic and apostolic Church of my Christ, to try to defend her? I am only a minimal part of her and almost nothing at all. Secondly, these officials, who are also sitting here as judges, support the side of the opponents; therefore it is not appropriate for me to point out to fundamentals of faith on which they have objections; these being the God-inspired Scripture and especially the books of the Prophets. Thirdly, I am in captivity, and I know after the example of the Lord, God and Savior of ours, Jesus Christ, that after being convicted, even when asked questions, he did not give answers. However, since this is what the great Emir orders – and I perceive that God gave him the right to know what a ruler has to know, because while the duty of the servant or of any common individual is to know about one faith and this only barely, it is necessary for him who has many races under his rule to know of all faiths and in an accurate way – for this reason I want to talk about our faith, all that the word of God will provide for me as I will open my mouth. And in doing so I will not be responding to the Chiones. For they, from what I heard about them before and from what they are now saying, seem to be Jews, not Muslims;<sup>39</sup> and my talk now is not to the Jews.

Thus, this mystery of our faith goes like this: Only God is the eternal Being and the One who remains forever, without beginning, unchangeable, without end, immutable, uncompounded, unconfused, without limitation. Every creature, however, is subject to corruption and change. Even the beginning itself is a change which came into being from non-existence. This God, therefore, the only one without a beginning, is not without wisdom. Thus the word of God is also the wisdom of God; for wisdom is in the word and without word wisdom does not exist.

Therefore if there were ever a time when the word or the wisdom of God did not exist, God would then be without word and without wisdom, which is a blasphemy and something impossible. Thus the word of God also is without beginning and the wisdom of God is never separated from Him. Also there is no word ever without spirit, something you, too, Turks confess. For by saying that Christ is the Word of God, you confess him also to be the Spirit of God, for this [the word] is never separated from the divine spirit. Thus God has both, word and spirit, which are with Him and in Him without beginning

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39 Lit. “Turks”.

and without separation. God was never, nor will He ever be, without Spirit or word.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, all three are one, and one the three.

God has word and spirit not in the manner we have them, vanishing in the air, but in a divine manner. To use an example: as the splendor of the sun is born from it, and the ray of the sun proceeds from it and comes down to us and never, neither the splendor, nor the ray, are they separated from the disc – for which reason when we call them “sun” we do not say that each one of them is different from the one – in the same way when we say that the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit too, is God, we do not confess another God but only the One who is perceived to be without beginning and without end, with a co-eternal word and spirit. This is what the Word of God taught us to believe and confess; not only Christ but Moses also in the Decalogue, whom you, the Chiones, bring forth. That is why he said “God is one” and he said the “one” three times. For he said the word “Lord” twice and the word “God” once, to show that the three are one and the one three. Also Moses, wanting to show from the beginning that God has word and spirit and that in them and with them He is one God creator of all created things said “God said: ‘Let it be light’; and there was light.<sup>41</sup> ... He said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation’ ... And it was so.”<sup>42</sup> And so that I may not repeat everything, as David said, “God said and everything was made.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore this “God said and everything was made” shows that God has word, for there is no speech without word. It also shows that all the created things were made by the means of it. Thus this word of God existed prior to all created things and he was uncreated. The word of God, being uncreated, how is he not God since only God is uncreated? Moses, teaching also about man says: “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, by saying that God breathed and that is how the living man was made, he shows that God has also spirit and that this spirit is creative. But only God is creator of living beings. That is why Job says: “It is the spirit of God that made me.”<sup>45</sup>

The bishop of Thessalonike<sup>46</sup> wanted also to string together the rest of the evidence from the prophets and especially those through which it is shown

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40 Gr. *alogos*. The word means both, “without word” or speech, as well as “without reason.”

41 Gen. 1.3.

42 Gen. 1.11.

43 Cf. Ps. 32(33).9.

44 Gen. 2.7.

45 Job 33.4.

46 The writer uses in all instances the expression *ho Thessalonikes* = the [bishop] of Thessalonike. In this translation I preferred to shorten the phrase with the expression “the bishop.”

that God works the renewal of man and of the entire world by means of His spirit; such as what David says “He sent forth his word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction”<sup>47</sup> and elsewhere again “Thou shalt send forth thy Spirit, and they shall be created; and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.”<sup>48</sup> These are the quotations which the bishop had started already stating, when all those attending interrupted him saying “What you are saying is true and cannot be otherwise.” Then the bishop responded to them “God, therefore, these three, is one God, creator.” And they, either moved by the divine power to do so or because they were unable to object, agreed again saying: “This is what you have shown and this is the truth. This is what we also maintain.” The bishop said: “Good. Glory be to our God who has willed so.” But they, too, said again: “But tell us this, How do you confess Christ to be God since he was a human and was born as human?” Again the bishop, “God is not only sovereign and all-mighty, but righteous as well, as David the prophet says: “The Lord our God is righteous, and loves righteousness; there is no injustice in him.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, there is no work of God that does not have in it the righteousness of God. As the ray of the sun has also the life-giving power, as well as light and warmth, so does the divine energy have in itself the divine power and righteousness. God created man to do good deeds and commanded him to live according to His own divine will. When, therefore, this man obeyed and submitted himself to the devil willingly and he sinned by transgressing the divine will and he was, justly, sentenced to death, it was not congenial to God to redeem man from him [the devil] by force; that way He would have been unjust to the devil, to have pulled out from his hands by force man whom he did not get by force. Also the free will of man would have been destroyed by the force and the power, as God would have been freeing man; and it is not like God to destroy His own work. It was, therefore, necessary that a sinless man be made, who would be without sin and who would live without sin and who, this way, would help the man who had sinned willingly. For it says: “Not even one is without sin; if even his life should be but one day.”<sup>50</sup> David also the prophet says: “I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me.”<sup>51</sup>

For this reason the only sinless Word of God becomes a son of man, is born from a virgin, is witnessed to with the voice of the Father from heaven, is tempted and fought by the devil, defeats the tempter, shows and confirms

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47 Ps. 106(107).20.

48 Ps. 103(104).30.

49 Cf. Ps. 10(11).8.

50 Cf. Job 14.4-5.

51 Ps. 50(51).5.

through deeds, words and great miracles the faith and the conduct of salvation and, in this way, He who was innocent and sinless, by living (as a human) he takes up to himself the passions of us who were the responsible ones, even to the extent of death, so that He may descend also to Hades and save those in there who may believe.

At this point – as the bishop talked about the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord and of the testimonies of the prophets which show that Christ is also God and that this God is the one who is witnessed to as having become man from the virgin and suffered for us and risen, and everything else – the Turks became disturbed, and they interrupted him saying, “How can you say that God was born and that the womb of a woman contained him, and many such things? God only said and Christ, too, was made.”<sup>52</sup> He then said to them, “God is not a big body that cannot fit because of its size into something small. On the contrary, by being incorporeal He is able to be everywhere, beyond everything and in one single thing. He can fit even into the smallest possible thing that one can imagine.” They, however, protested again noisily, saying that “God only said and Christ, too, was made.” The bishop said again: “You confess that Christ is the word of God. A word, then, is made again by another word? In such a case it will mean that the word of God is not co-eternal with God Himself. But I showed you this at the beginning and you, too, confessed that God has a Word and a Spirit co-eternal with Him. That is why you call Christ not only word but also spirit of God. God said and things were made, like this stone – pointing to a stone nearby – the herb and even the reptiles. Therefore, if Christ is the word and spirit of God because he was made by the word of God, then the stone, the herb and every one of the reptiles is also word and spirit of God because in their case also He said and they were made! You see how absurd it is to say that “God said and Christ, too, was made”? The pre-eternal Word of God, even though he became human and took up flesh, without mixture [of the two] or in the manner of flesh, is spirit and word of God. It was later, as we said, that he took up from us and for our sake the human nature. He was always in God as His co-eternal Word “through whom God created the world.”<sup>53</sup>

At this point the Chiones interrupted him again, and the presiding Palapanos, after he called for silence, said to the bishop, “The master demands from you to answer the question, How do we accept Christ, love him, respect him, confess him to be God’s word and breath, and we also place his mother near to God, but you do not accept our prophet nor do you love him?” Then

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52 Surah 3:59: “Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Adam is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust and then He said unto him: Be! and he is.”

53 Heb. 1:2.

the bishop said: “He who does not believe in the words of a teacher cannot love the teacher himself; that is why we do not love Muhammad. Our Lord God Jesus Christ has said to us that he will come again to judge the entire world. He also commanded us not to receive anyone else until He will come back to us again. He also said to those who disbelieved in him: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me, nor did you accept me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.”<sup>54</sup> That is why the disciple [sic] of Christ writes to us: “But even if an angel preaches to you contrary to that which you have received from us let him be accursed.”<sup>55</sup>

Then the Chiones, along with the Turks, said to the bishop: “Circumcision was handed down by God from the very beginning. Even Christ himself was circumcised. How then, you do not circumcise yourselves?” Then the bishop: “Since you are referring to the old law and to what was handed down by God to the Hebrews at that time – for traditions of God also were the keeping of the Sabbath, the Jewish Passover, sacrifices which were to be offered exclusively by the priests, the altar in the interior of the temple, and the dividing curtain – since all these and other such things have also been handed down by God, why do you not cherish any of them and you do not practice them?”

As the Chiones and Turks had no response to this, the bishop wanted to bring forth again those prophets who foretell clearly *the* transfer of the law and of that old testament and [who also foretell] that the transfer will take place through Christ; and he started saying: “That which you also call old ...”<sup>56</sup> They interrupted him again saying: “Why do you place many representations in your churches and you venerate them, even though God wrote and said to Moses: “Thou shalt not make a likeness of anything, whatever things are in heaven above, and whatever are in the earth beneath, and whatever are in the sea?”<sup>57</sup> And the bishop said again: “Friends are venerated by each other, but they are not made gods. It is evident to everyone that this is, indeed, what Moses learned from God and this is what he taught the people then. However, this same Moses again and at that time, left almost nothing of which he did not make a representation. He made the area beyond the curtain to be like and represent the celestial [reality]. Also, since the Cherubim are in heaven, he made representations of them and placed them into the innermost sanctuary of the temple. As to the exterior of the temple, he made it to represent the earthly [reality]. If anyone, then, had questioned Moses, “Why have you made

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54 Jn. 5.43.

55 Gal. 1.8.

56 The text at this point is incomplete.

57 Cf. Ex. 20.4.



anyway such things, since God forbids the icons and the likeness of things in heaven and of things on earth?"; he would have, certainly, answered that "Icons and representations are forbidden so that one may not worship them as gods. However, if one is to be elevated through them toward God, this is good!" The Greeks, too, praised created things but they did so as if they were gods. We praise them too, but we elevate ourselves through them to the glory of God." Then the Turks said again: "Did, indeed, Moses make these things then?" Answered many, "Yes, he did all these things."

At this point the officials of the Turks stood up, greeted with respect the bishop, and started leaving. One of the Chiones, however, stayed behind, insulted the great bishop of God, attacked him and beat him in the eye. The rest of the Turks who saw him, got hold of him, rebuked him severely and brought him in front of the Emir to whom they said whatever they said. What the Turks said to the Emir we did not hear exactly. As to what we have written down, however, we have been ear-witnesses. We wrote down what we saw and heard under the sight of God Himself.

This exchange<sup>58</sup> took place in the month of July, on the eighth indiction of the year 1363.<sup>59</sup>

You should know also that I came to live in Nicaea during which time, having some freedom, I described briefly to your love the things regarding my captivity, leaving aside those things regarding our brethren in Christ, my fellow-captives for His sake. So that you may know a few things of what happened approximately there, it is only when they are transferring us from city to city or town that the barbarians place guards for us; and it would be something very pleasant, indeed, to the ears of the Christians, if one had the time to write down their questions to us and our responses to them, or the things on which they concur with us, or simply all the conversations we had on the way. But when the guards bring us into the designated city or town, each one of them retires to his own, allowing us to stay or go wherever we please, and to associate with anyone we want, and I think that this, too, is not something that is not of a major providence.

Thus, as soon as they left us also free in Nicaea, as usual, we asked as to where most of the Christians of this city live. When we learned that they lived by the monastery of Saint Hyacinth we went there immediately and met with the Christians who were eagerly expecting us and wishing that such a things would happen. In the interior, beyond the yard of the monastery, we found a beautiful church and a well with fresh water in the midst of various thick – shade

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58 Lit., lecture.

59 I.e., in the year 1355.

trees sumptuously blooming. The cool breeze, the comfort of the shade and the soothing quietness of the place, made us settle there; actually I did so, for I was alone. As far as the most God-loving chartophylax<sup>60</sup> is concerned, whom they had brought in front of the great Emir, I did not know where exactly he was allowed to stay. As to the hieromonks Joseph and my own Gerasimos, they were already in Constantinople at that time. Konstas Kalamaris was still then alone in Prusa, living in the home of a certain pious man who had set him free with money. As he had not paid back the whole amount for his freedom, when I arrived there I paid the entire amount for him with the help, or rather by a miracle, of God, and he was set free. But I did not take him then with me, for I did not know where I was going to end up. But now, having written to him asking him to come I, the captive, have him, a free man, as a companion and servant! And let this be added to the strange stories; that the captive grants freedom to his fellow-captive and he, who is not even master of himself, has under his authority a free man!

In the ensuing I will tell you a story from when, as I said, I was living alone: I went once out the gate of the city, called "eastern," that was the closest also of all the others. As I had walked a little beyond the gate – what can I say about the height and the beauty of the buildings, or about the fortifications; all these were in abundance in that city although to no avail now! – well, as I had walked a little further, I saw in the plains a cubic structure made of marble and somewhat artistically decorated. I then asked those who happened to be around what is the use of that cube being outside [the walls] of the city, and standing there nearby, ready. They told me what the cube was for, and this is how the whole conversation ended. Then we heard wailing coming from inside the city. As we turned to the direction of the noise we saw a whole group of barbarians bringing out the body of a dead man. Walking slowly we came so close to them that we were able to see and hear what they were doing and saying. When they arrived at the cube they all observed an absolute silence and then more of them, lifting up the box wrapped in white sheets with the dead man inside, placed it solemnly on the cube. Surrounding him they had in their midst one of their Tasimanes – this is how they call those dedicated to their sacred places. He, rising up his hands, let out a cry and they responded even louder. He did this three times. Then those who were set to do the burying take the box up on their arms and walk further down. All the rest of them, with the Tasimanes, returned home.

We also were returning, entering next to them the same gate when we noted that the Tasimanes with a few others sat down under the shadow of the gate to

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60 *Chartoularios*, keeper of archives.

enjoy the cool air of the season; for it was July. Suspecting that those sitting on the opposite side might be Christians, as they were, we sat down, too. As I was sitting there I asked whether anyone could speak both languages that I needed. There was somebody, whom I asked to say to the Turks on my behalf that what they had performed outside there I thought it was good, “for you addressed yourselves to God – to whom else? – for the deceased one. I wanted, however, to know what was that you exclaimed to God?” Tasimanes using the same interpreter said that he would explain: “We asked for forgiveness from God for the deceased, for his own sins committed in his soul.” Retorting myself I said, “Very well, but the judge is merciful, indeed, and dispenses mercy; and he who will come as judge of every race of men, even according to you, is Christ. You must be addressing, therefore, the prayers and the exclamations to Him. Thus you, too, invoke him as God, as we do, who believe that as an inborn Word of His he is indivisible from the Father; for there was no time when God was without reason or without the natural word.” Tasimanes then said, “Christ, too, is a servant of God.”<sup>61</sup> I said to him “But you must consider this, my good man, that as you also say, He will judge the living and the dead, who will rise and present themselves in front of Him at a fearful and impartial tribunal in the coming presence of His. Abraham, who is also your own forefather as you have it in your own scriptures (for you insist that you uphold the tradition of Moses, as it is also maintained by the Jews), this Abraham, therefore, says to God, ‘Thou that judgest the whole earth, shalt thou not do right?’<sup>62</sup> Thus He who will judge the entire earth is himself God, who, according to Daniel the prophet is King of the whole universe forever,<sup>63</sup> being no different than the Father according to the divinity; in the same way as the brightness of the sun is no different than the sun, so far as the light is concerned.”

Tasimanes gave the impression that he found himself in a difficult situation, but after a brief silence he started a longer speech. Then many more Christians and Turks gathered to listen. Thus, he began saying that they accept all the prophets including Christ as well as the four books sent down from God, one of which is also the gospel of Christ.<sup>64</sup> When he finished he turned the speech to

61 Cf. Surah, 4.172; 19.30, (93); 43.59.

62 Gen. 18.25 (Samuel Bagster translation of *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament*). The Greek version of the Septuagint suggests a different translation (“Thou ..., shalt thou not pass a judgment? [or] ... make a ruling?”), which is closer to the Hebrew, and contextually more justifiable. The RSV (“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”) is equally presumptuous.

63 Daniel, 5.21.

64 The “four books” referred to here are the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, the Gospel of Jesus and the Qur’an of Muhammad. On account of the acceptance of this prophetic

me saying, "Why then, do you not accept our prophet or do you not believe that his book came down from heaven?" I said to him again: "Your custom and our custom that has been confirmed by antiquity and law, is to accept or consent to nothing as true without witnesses. And there are two kinds of true witnesses; either those because of their works and deeds, or those because of their trustworthiness as persons. Thus Moses disciplined Egypt with signs and marvels. With his rod he split the sea into two and he united it again. He also brought down bread from heaven. But what is the use of mentioning the rest since you also believe in Moses? He has also been witnessed to by God as a trustworthy servant, although not as a Son and Word. Later on, at God's commandment, he ascended to the mountain and died, and he added himself to those who had preceded him. On the other hand, Christ, in addition to the extraordinary things that he did, which are many and great, is witnessed to by Moses himself and the other prophets; He is also the only one who is called eternal Word of God by you, as well. He is the only one ever born of a virgin; the only one ever who ascended into heaven and remains there immortal; the only one ever who is hoped to come back thence to judge the living and the dead who will rise – to mention about him only what you, too, the Turks confess. It is, therefore, for all these that we believe in Christ and His Gospel. As far as Muhammad is concerned we do not find that he is either witnessed to by the prophets, or that he did anything unusual or worthwhile leading to faith. That is why we do not believe in him or his book."

It was clear that Tasimanes was unable to put up with this. Yet he responded saying: "There was reference to Muhammad in the Gospel but you cut it out.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, setting out from the farthest East he progressed victoriously, as you can see, all the way to the West." I, then, said to him: "Insofar as the gospel is concerned nothing was ever cut out from it by any Christian, or altered in any way. There are heavy and most shivering curses for such an act, and he who dares to either cut out or to alter anything, is cut off actually from Christ. How is it possible then, that a Christian did such a thing, or how could he be still a Christian, or in any way acceptable among the Christians if he had erased off what has been divinely engraved and what Christ himself imprinted or foretold? Witnesses to this are also the many and various dialects in which the gospel of Christ was conveyed from the very beginning; it was not written originally in only one [dialect]. If anything was distorted, how did this pass unnoticed, and

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progressive revelation the Jews and the Christians are, to the Muslims, the 'People of the Book' (*ahl-al-Kitāb*).

65 This is the Islamic doctrine of *tahrif* or 'corruption' according to which the Christians have corrupted their Scriptures to conceal their prediction of the advent of Muhammad.

how was such an agreement kept in the minds of various nations until today? Also many people of a different faith have the Gospel of Christ, whom we call heretics, among whom there are some who agree with us on some issues, and yet they, too, do not have any such thing to show in the Gospel of Christ. Even among those who were adversaries from the Beginning – and there are many of these – there is no such thing to be shown. The opposite, rather, can be found clearly in the Gospel. How is it then that the Gospel confirmed something to the opponents which itself does not contain and which was not told before to the divine prophets? If there were anything good about Muhammad written in the Gospel it would have also been written in the prophets. On the contrary, you may rather find not wiped out but written that “many false Christs and false prophets will arise and lead many astray.”<sup>66</sup>

If Christ were like Moses and the prophets of all ages before and after him (they all returned through death to the earth resting there and awaiting the judge who is to come from heaven), the same would have happened with Him. In that case another prophet should have come after him again who would have ascended into heaven and brought his [mission] to an end; for the end of everything that is here is in heaven.<sup>67</sup> However, as you also confess, Christ did ascend into heaven and no-one of right mind does expect anyone after Him. Not only did Christ ascend into heaven, but it is the same who is expected to return as you, too, confess. Thus, he is the one who came, who comes, and who is expected to return and we, rightly so, neither accept nor are we waiting for anyone other than Him. He is expected to come again to judge all men. Why? Because, as He Himself said, the light that is He and His teaching came and became manifest to the world; but men, promulgating different teachings and indulging deeply in their own desires, loved the darkness rather than the light.<sup>68</sup> So that, therefore, this may not happen to us, the pinnacle of the disciples of Christ says, “there will be false teachers and false prophets who will bring in destructive heresies, and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; for many will follow their licentiousness.”<sup>69</sup> Another one says, “even if an angel should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.”<sup>70</sup> And the evangelist says, “every spirit which does not confess that the Lord Jesus Christ has come in flesh, is not of God.”<sup>71</sup> How would He who says that “he who confesses that Jesus – the one manifested in

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66 Mt. 24.11, 24.

67 Cf. Lk. 21.8, 9.

68 Cf. Jn. 3.19.

69 Cf. 2 Pet. 2.1–3.

70 Cf. Gal. 1.8.

71 Cf. 1 Jn. 4.3, 4.

flesh – is not Lord, is not from God” have given a book that says that he who confirms this comes from God? This is not possible; not at all!

Muhammad marched from the East and he progressed victoriously to the West. He did so, however, by the means of war and the sword, with pillage, enslavement and executions, none of which has its origin in God, the righteous One, but he is advancing the will of him who from the beginning was the destroyer of man. How about Alexander? Did he not, starting from the West, conquer the East? There have also been other men at other times who, after repeated campaigns over-ruled the entire world. However, no nation entrusted their souls to any of them, as you did with Muhammad, who, although he resorted to violence and allowed licentious things, did not take into his fold even a whole portion of the world. On the other hand, the teaching of Christ although it directs one away from *almost* all the pleasures of the world, has embraced the universe to its ends. It endures even among its enemies without instigating violence, but rather every time winning the adversary force; for “this is the victory that has overcome the world.”<sup>72</sup>

When I was saying this, the Christians who happened to be there, seeing that the Turks were already getting irritated, signaled me to finish my speech. And I, changing to a milder tone and smiling gently at them, said again, “After all, if we were in one accord, we would be of one and the same faith, too.” But let him who is intelligent appreciate the meaning of what we said. Then one of them said, “There will come a time when we will agree with each other.” I consented and I amplified the wish that such a time may come more quickly. But why did I say this for those who abide by a different faith now, rather than for those who would be living then! I consented because I remembered the Apostle’s saying that “at the name of Jesus Christ every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”;<sup>73</sup> and this will certainly come to pass in the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At this, the gathering dispersed for the day. As to what went on the next days the spirit is willing but the hand is not strong enough to write about. That much I wrote for those of you who desire to know. For children and even more so those who are mindful of their spiritual adoption, want to know the experiences of their father. As when I was with you I used, privately and publicly, to teach you persistently with my words the way that leads to salvation, never lowering my standards even though some thought I was heavy to bear, the same thing I do now that I am absent and in the midst of tribulation. Even briefly, I am writing to you all, not withholding anything; for [this way] we

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. 1 Jn. 5.4.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Phil. 2.10–11.

become rich in God,<sup>74</sup> the living and the true One, who is witnessed to not only by God the Father and the God-sent prophets, but also by their works and deeds. Justifiably, therefore, He demands that our faith in Him be alive, truthful and witnessed to by God and by the teachers who come from God, as well as by their works and deeds. This, then, will be accomplished if we live according to the injunctions of the Gospel. For, this way, the spirit of the grace of the Gospel “bears witness” according to the Apostle “with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”<sup>75</sup> This is the living faith; for “faith apart from works is dead,”<sup>76</sup> says another one of the preachers of faith. And something that is dead is not welcome by the living God; for God “is not God of the dead, but of the living.”<sup>77</sup> He, therefore, whose faith is dead for lack of good deeds, is himself also dead for not living and being in God – the only one who provides true and inviolate life; until such time as he experiences, like the saved prodigal son, the poverty that he suffered by taking distance from the deeds of life, and returns to God through the deeds of repentance, and until he hears from Him, the words like that saved prodigal son, “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”<sup>78</sup> This is the way to have a true faith. For, faith that is not witnessed to by works of salvation is no more faith than unbelief and no more confession than apostasy. This is what he who talks about such things indicates: “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.”<sup>79</sup> Another of the fellow disciples says: “Show me your faith with your deeds”;<sup>80</sup> and “Who is faithful; let him by his good life show his deeds.”<sup>81</sup> What is the merit if one says that he has faith, but he shows no deeds? Can faith save him? Not at all. You may believe that Christ is one God along with the Father and the Spirit. Good enough. However, even the demons believe and are terrified when they say “We know who you are: the Son of God in the Highest.”<sup>82</sup> And yet the demons are adversaries, precisely because they oppose God with their works.

Be mindful not to be like these ill-minded men; I do not mean in regard to your reverence in God, but rather in your conduct as they suffered in the doctrine. For they confess that he who was born of the Virgin is the Word of God

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74 Cf. Lk. 12.21.

75 Rom. 8.16–17.

76 Jas. 2.26.

77 Mt. 22.32.

78 Lk. 15.24.

79 Tit. 1.16.

80 Jas. 2.18.

81 Cf. Jas. 3.13.

82 Cf. Mk. 5.7.

and spirit of His and Christ, that is God-man, but then they flee and break away from him madly as non-God. Take heed, therefore, not to be like them and find yourselves, on the one hand confessing that the virtues and the biblical injunctions are righteous, and on the other hand with your deeds breaking away from them as if they were not so; showing that what is indeed good is not good for you and what is indeed permissible is something to flee from.

Tell me, how is it possible that an unbeliever may trust you when you say that you believe in Him who was born of the Virgin, born from the Father beyond time and before all ages, and subsequently in time – in a supernatural way – by a mother, but you practice neither chastity nor prudence, and you rather insist passionately and unrepentedly on the opposite [acts] and let yourself be surrendered to debauchery? How can the drunkard and the glutton show themselves as having become, through the Spirit, adopted sons of Him who fasted in the desert for forty days and who with His example gave the ordinance of temperance? How can he who loves injustice be one [an adopted son] of Him who commands us to judge with right judgment;<sup>83</sup> or the heartless, of Him who said “Be merciful, even as your Father in Heaven is merciful”,<sup>84</sup> or he who has no sympathy and magnanimity towards those who fail or he shows no gentleness, tolerance and humility, to Him who showed us these virtues with deeds and who urged us towards them with words? For He says: “Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”,<sup>85</sup> and “if you do not forgive the trespasses of your brethren, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.”<sup>86</sup> Even when he was hanging on the cross, offering Himself as an example to us, He kept saying to the Father not to hold this sin against them.

One might, of course, say that He was God and, as such, detached from evil. I have many things to say about this, but time does not allow me. I am not asking from you, however, for divine but human goodness. Make a start in this goodness and God will provide its perfection. Detach yourself from evil; stay in the place of virtue. Undertake the deeds of repentance and while waiting, you will receive from God not only the perfection of human goodness, but you will also acquire the supernatural divine virtues, by the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in you. This is how man is deified. For he who is clinging to God by means of the works of virtue becomes one spirit with God,<sup>87</sup> through the grace

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83 Cf. Jn. 7.24.

84 Cf. Lk. 6.36.

85 Mt. 11.29.

86 Cf. Mt. 6.15.

87 Cf. 1 Cor. 6.17.



of the Holy Spirit. This may be with you all always now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Unlike another great Father of the East, John of Damascus, six hundred years earlier, Palamas demonstrates a popular rather than sophisticated knowledge of Islam. In this respect the above texts – although not yet fully analyzed – provide minimal original material to the Muslim-Christian dialogue. The significance of these texts lies in what we learn from them about the Byzantine Christians and the Muslims in Anatolia in the middle of the fourteenth century as a prelude to the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire. Even more so, however, we gain from them another insight of Gregory Palamas' own personality and of his progressive awareness of the Muslim reality. What is significant is Palamas' direct – even though unwilling and circumstantial – encounter with Islam, as well as the fact that he intensely observed and diligently reported to his Christians what he observed and experienced; a valuable historical document. As a mystic he was better prepared than many of his contemporaries to transcend the visible physical circumstances and to address himself, as a spiritual master, to the more profound human spiritual condition. He lived in captivity under the Turks, but he entered into a persistent, meaningful dialogue with them, earning their anger, but also their respect. He remained the hesychast teacher of deification.

Although these particular documents cannot offer but a limited view of the entire spectrum of the Byzantine anti-Islamic literature, they can nevertheless support tentatively the following general comment: Writers of spiritual and mystical disposition, although openly critical towards the Muslims, did not hesitate to enter into a dialogue with them. On the contrary, they allowed themselves convincingly to see Islam as part of God's wholesome and unknown scheme of human salvation. They saw Islam from the Christian point of view and as such coming short of God's ultimate offer – the Incarnation of his own Logos. Nonetheless they perceived Islam as the means through which the Muslims relate directly to God through word and spirit. Thus, John of Damascus – the theologian of the icon, the monk of the Judean desert, and possibly the initiator of Muslim-Christian dialogue – treats Islam as a *Christian* heresy. Gregory Palamas – the theologian of *theosis*, a leader of the hesychasts, and one of the last Byzantine interlocutors with Islam – treats Islam as *theoseveia*, even though he speaks of the Turks as “most barbaric among the barbarians.”



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